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BEACON TO ELSEWHERE

- a Complete Novel

by James H. Schmitz



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Amazing

Fact and Science Fiction Stories

April, 1963 Vol. 37, No. 4

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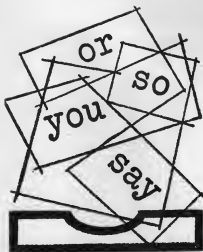
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Dear Miss Goldsmith:

Since it has become apparent that a number of fans are writing letters to you concerning the series of SF Profiles I have gathered up enough courage to do the same myself.

The profiles have been interesting, immensely absorbing and I have enjoyed each and every one that I have been able to get my clutches on. But be that as it may, this doesn't make up for the fact that some minor authors have taken precedence over major ones. I have not run into a great deal of science fiction by C. L. Moore since my acquaintance with SF other than a few stories she did in collaboration with her husband, Henry Kuttner. And Robert Bloch is hardly more than a name! Although

Arthur C. Clarke is the upcoming profile, it doesn't seem proper that he should have to wait to this late of date for one.

In summary I would like to suggest to Mr. Moskowitz these two practitioners to be profiled soon: Alfred Bester and John W. Campbell, Jr.

Jim Maughan
230 'N' Street
Tumwater, Wash.

● *Perhaps we will. But Bester has written little and Campbell has written no science-fiction in recent years. And what do you mean that Bloch is only a name?*

Dear Editor:

"Cerebrum," which was a big improvement for Teichner, was the best story in the January issue. "It Could Be Anything" was also very good, but not quite as good as Laumer can do and has done in the past.

Mr. Yacuk seems to be spoiling for a fight and I am happy to oblige. Heroes do *not* have to be bigger than life. One of the important ingredients which add to the enjoyment of the reader is a hero he can identify with. Who could identify with Tarzan? The idea that a tremendous hero is needed to support a wild action plot is also false. Was Legion of "A Trace Of Memory" or Will Barrent of "Omega" a

(continued on page 125)



EDITORIAL

WHEN they tell you it's impossible for life to exist on Saturn, or that telepathy is the bunk, you can feel a little more reassured about not necessarily believing them. Because almost everytime something new is discovered on the frontiers of science—on the line between *s* and *sf*—it develops that *s* was wrong in its preconceptions.

The magnificent journey of Mariner II, our Venus probe, added another scintilla of evidence for this attitude. Mariner's radar investigation of Venus indicated, for the first time, that Venus may be rotating backwards; that is, clockwise; that is, in a direction opposite to that of Earth's rotation. In addition, Venus seems to rotate slowly—perhaps turning on its axis only once in every 250 earth-days. This would make for a "day" and a "night" each equal to 125 earthly days and nights. (What a break to the *sf* writer searching for a new idea for a life-on-Venus story!)

The data was obtained by bouncing a coded radar signal off the planet. By listening to brief segments of the signal's echo,

scientists could electronically "divide" Venus into five concentric zones, much like a rifle target. By analyzing the echoes returning from each zone, it was possible to distinguish some parts of Venus' cloud-shrouded surface from other parts. The next step was to measure the Doppler effect of the signal as it bounced back from the various zones, and thus determine the apparent rate and direction of rotation.

Another result of Mariner's exploration of Venus was that the planet's temperature seems to reach a peak of not more than 600 degrees F. This is considerably less than the estimate of many scientists who have envisioned Venus as a furnace of a planet, with an air temperature in the thousands of degrees. What makes this particularly interesting—apart from the fact that it makes more likely the possibility of life on the planet—is that it validates a theory that had been maligned by respectable scientists.

(Continued on page 120)

The forces of the Universe met at Lion Mesa. They were represented by the rebel Terrans; by Dowland of the Interstellar Police; and by the monstrous shapes from an alien galaxy. They all sought the same thing: the time-wrenching power of . . .

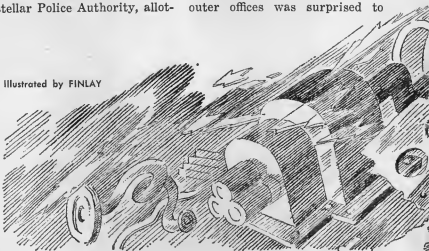
the **BEACON** to **ELSEWHERE**

Complete Novel by JAMES H. SCHMITZ

IT didn't happen twice a year that Gustavus Robert Fry, Chief Commissioner of the Interstellar Police Authority, allot-

ted more than an hour in his working day to any one appointment. However, nobody in the outer offices was surprised to

Illustrated by FINLAY





learn that the chief expected to remain in conference until noon today, and was not to be disturbed before then. The visitor who had been ushered in to him—without benefit of appointment—was Howard Camhorn, the Overgovernment's Coordinator of Research. It was a meeting of political mastodons. Portentous events would be on the agenda.

Seated at the desk in his private office, Gus Fry, massive, strong-jawed, cold-eyed—looking precisely like the powerhouse, political and otherwise, which he was—did not feel entirely at ease. Howard Camhorn, sprawled in a chair half across the room from the Chief Commissioner, might have passed for a middle-aged, moderately successful artist. He was lanky, sandy-haired, with a lazy smile, lazier gestures. But he was, by several degrees, the bigger VIP of the two.

Camhorn said, "There's no question at all, of course, that the space transport your boys picked up is the one we're interested in. But is it absolutely certain that our Ym-400 is no longer on board?"

Fry shrugged. "It's certain that it isn't in the compartment where it was stored for the trip—and the locks to that compartment have been forced. It's possible that whoever removed the two YM cases has concealed

them in some other part of the ship. That would be easy to do, but . . ."

Camhorn shook his head. "No," he said. "Nobody would benefit from that. I'm afraid we'll have to resign ourselves to the fact that the stuff has been taken."

FRY said, "It looks like it. The police search will go on until your own investigators get there, but there's no reason to believe anything will be found."

"The ship's course had been reset so that it was headed into unoccupied space?"

"Yes," said Fry. "It was only by a very improbable coincidence that an IPA boat happened to spot it. The transport's new course wouldn't have brought it anywhere near a traffic lane, inhabited planet, or normal patrol route. Three weeks later, when its fuel was exhausted, the planted explosives would have blown it up without a chance that the wreckage would ever be detected."

"How about the cargo? Have you heard about that? Was it otherwise intact?"

"As far as we can tell. The shippers will check everything in detail when the freighter gets back to port. But it's a good guess that the Overgovernment's Ym-400 is the only item missing."

CAMHORN nodded. "A group which was planning to pick it up wouldn't be very interested in ordinary loot. That seems to make it conclusive." He wrinkled his nose reflectively. "Modus operandi?" he asked.

"Two possibilities," Fry said. "They had themselves loaded aboard with the cargo, or they intercepted the transport en route and entered it in flight."

"Which do you like?"

"The first. In fact, the other is hardly a possibility. Even the IPA couldn't get aboard a modern automatic freighter between ports without setting off an explosion of alarms in every flight control station on its course. No such alarm was recorded. And there is no indication of a forcible entry."

"So our thieves had themselves loaded on," said Camhorn. "Now, Gus, I've always been under the impression that the check system which keeps stowaways out of the automatic transports was foolproof."

The IPA Chief shrugged. "It's been foolproof so far. But not because it was impossible to circumvent. It's simply that circumventing the check system would add up to so enormously expensive a proposition that the total cash value of a transport and its cargo wouldn't be worth the trouble. These people definitely were not considering expenses."

"Apparently not," Camhorn said. "So how did they get the Ym-400 off the ship?"

"They had a small boat loaded on board with them. That's a supposition, so far; they left very few traces of their activities. But it's the only way the thing could have been done. They had obtained exact information of the transport's plotted route and time schedule. At a calculated point, they picked up the two cases of YM, rerouted the ship, timed and planted their explosives, disconnected the alarm system at the entry lock, and left in the boat. Naturally, another ship was moving along with the freighter by then, waiting to pick them up. That's all there was to it."

"You make it sound simple," said Camhorn.

"The difficulty," said Gus Fry, "would be in preparing such an operation. No matter how much money these people could lay on the line, they must have spent several months in making the necessary arrangements without once alerting the port authorities."

"They had enough time," Camhorn admitted reflectively. "Ym-400 has been shipped for a number of years in the same manner and over the same route."

"I've been wondering," Fry remarked, "why this manner of shipping it was selected."

Camhorn smiled briefly. "When was the last time an automatic transport was hijacked, Gus?"

"Fifty-seven years ago," Fry said. "And the method employed then wouldn't have worked on a modern transport, or under the present check system."

"Well, that's part of your answer. Automatic shipping risks have become negligible. The rest of the answer is that we've avoided too obviously elaborate safeguards for Ym-400. If we put it on a battleship each time it was moved, the technological espionage brethren would hear about it. Which means that everybody who might be interested would hear about it. And once the word got out, we'd start losing the stuff regardless of safeguards to people who'd be willing to work out for themselves just what made it so valuable to the Overgovernment. As it is, this is the first sample of Ym-400 to go astray in the thirty-two years we've had it."

"Two thirty-four kilogram cases," Fry said. "Is that a significant amount?"

"I'm afraid it's an extremely significant amount," Camhorn said wryly.

Fry hesitated, said, "There's something very odd about this, Howard. . . ."

"What's that?"

"I had the definite impression a few hours ago that you were al-

most relieved to hear about the transport."

CAMHORN studied him for a few seconds. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I was. Because of one thing. If this hadn't been obviously a criminal act, humanly engineered—if the transport, say, had simply blown up en route or vanished without giving an alarm . . ."

"Vanished without giving an alarm?" Fry repeated slowly. "Without human intervention?"

"If," said Camhorn, "any least part of the Ym-400 it was carrying had been radioactive, I wouldn't have been surprised to learn something like that had happened. But, of course, the shipment was stable. And stable Ym-400 has shown no more disturbing potentialities to date than the equivalent amount of pig iron. If it ever develops them, the research programs connected with the substance will be indefinitely delayed. They may have to be abandoned." He gave Fry his lazy smile. "Does that explain my apparent relief, Gus?"

"More or less," Gus Fry said. "Would it be a calamity if those particular programs had to be abandoned?"

"The Overgovernment would consider it a calamity, yes."

"Why?"

"If and when," said Camhorn,

"the bugs get worked out of Ym-400, it may ensure our future control of space against any foreseeable opposition."

Fry kept his face carefully expressionless.

"So, naturally," Camhorn went on, "we'd prefer to keep dissident groups from playing around with the substance, or becoming aware of its possibilities."

Fry said, "There seems to be at least one dissident group which has much more complete information about Ym-400 than, for example, the Interstellar Police Authority."

Camhorn shook his head. "We can't say how much they really knew, Gus. The theft might have been arranged as a speculative operation. There's enough loose money in large quantities around to make that quite possible."

Fry grunted. "Do you have any definite suspects?"

"A great many. Unfortunately, there seems to be at least some probability that the people involved won't turn out to be among them. However, those lists will provide an immediate starting point. They're being transferred to the IPA today."

"Thanks," Fry said sourly.

"I wouldn't do it if I didn't have to, Gus. Our Research investigators can't begin to cope with a number like that. They will cooperate with you closely, of course."

"Nobody else will," said Fry. "I've come to the conclusion that our current populations are the least cooperative people in the history of the race."

Camhorn nodded. "Naturally."

"Naturally? Why should they be? Most of them are a little short of living space—unless they're willing to put up with frontier conditions—but otherwise humanity's never had it so good. They're not repressed; they're babied along—ninetenths of the time anyway. They do just about as they damn well please. Thirty percent of them won't turn out a stroke of honest work from the beginning of their lives to the end."

"True enough. And you've described an almost perfect setting for profound discontent. Which is being carefully maintained, by the way. We don't want humanity to go to sleep entirely just yet. Gus, how much do you know personally about Ym-400?"

"Nothing," said Fry. "Now and then some rumor about it comes to the IPA's attention. Rumors of that kind go into our files as a matter of course. I see the files."

"Well, then," said Camhorn, "what rumors have you seen?"

"I can give you those," Fry said, "in a few sentences. YM—or Ym-400—is an element rather recently discovered by the Overgovernment's scientists; within

the past few decades. It has the property of 'transmuting space-time stresses'—that's the rumor, verbatim. In that respect, it has some unspecified association with Riemann space phenomena. It has been located in a star system which lies beyond the areas officially listed as explored, and which at present is heavily guarded by Overgovernment ships. In this system is an asteroid belt, constituting the remnants of a planet broken up in an earlier period by YM action. And three," Fry added, grinning wolfishly, "I can even bring in a factual detail. I know that there is such a guarded system, and that it contains nothing but its star and the asteroid belt referred to. I could give you its location, but I'm sure you're familiar with it."

Camhorn nodded. "I am. Any other rumors?"

"I think that sums them up."

WELL," Camhorn said judiciously, "if the IPA is to be of much use to us in this investigation, it should be better informed than that. The rumors are interesting, though satisfactorily inaccurate. Ym-400, to begin with, is not a single element. It's a compound of several elements of the same series. The symbol attached to it is quite meaningless . . ."

"For security reasons?"

"Of course. Now, with one notable exception, all elements in this series were discovered during the Overgovernment's investigation of Riemann space properties in the two intragalactic creation areas we have mapped to date. As you may recall, that program was initiated forty-five years ago. The elements we're talking about are radioactive: half-life of up to an hour. It was suspected they had a connection with the very curious, apparently random distortions of space-time factors found in the creation areas, but their essential properties made it impossible to produce them in sufficient quantity for a sufficient length of time to conduct a meaningful examination.

"Ymir, the last element of this series, was not discovered in the same areas, or at the same time. It was located ten years later, in stable trace-quantities in the asteroid belt you've mentioned, and to date it has not been found anywhere else. Ymir is a freak. It is chemically very similar to the rest of the series and has an unstable structure. Theoretically, its presence as and where it was found was an impossibility. But it was recognized eventually that Ymir produces a force field which inhibits radioactivity. Until the field is interfered with the element is stable. . . ."

"What interferes with it?"

Camhorn grinned. "People. Until it's deliberately tampered with, Ymir is changeless—as far as we know. Furthermore it will, in compound, extend its inhibiting field effect instantaneously to three other elements of the same series. A very fortunate circumstance, because Ymir has been found only in minute amounts, and unknown factors still prevent its artificial production. The other three elements are produced readily, and since a very small proportion of Ymir retains them in stable—or pseudostable—form, they can be conserved indefinitely."

"That's the Ym-400 compound?" Fry asked.

"That's it."

Fry said thoughtfully, "Perhaps I should remind you, Howard, that this conversation is being recorded."

Camhorn nodded. "That's all right. Now that we know someone else is in possession of sixty-eight kilograms of Ym-400, we're confronted with radically altered circumstances. The loss incurred by the theft isn't important in itself. The Ymir component in such a quantity is detectable almost only by its effects, and the other components can be produced at will.

THE question is how much the people who have the stolen compound in their hands actu-

ally know about it. We would prefer them to know several things. For example, up to a point Ym-400 is easily handled. It's a comparatively simple operation to reduce or restore the force field effect. The result is a controlled flow of radioactivity from the compound, or its cessation. Now, you've mentioned having heard that Ym-400 transmutes space-time stresses—"

Fry nodded.

"Well," Camhorn said, "as a matter of fact, that's exactly what it appears to do—as was surmised originally of the unstable elements in the series. The active compound transmutes space-time stresses into a new energy with theoretically predictable properties. Theoretically, for example, this new energy should again be completely controllable. Have you picked up any rumors of what our experiments with the substance were supposed to achieve?"

Fry said, "Yes. I forgot that. I've heard two alternate theories. One is that the end result will be an explosive of almost unimaginable violence. The other is that you're working to obtain a matter transmitter—possibly one with an interstellar range."

Camhorn nodded. "Potentially," he said, "Ym-400 is an extremely violent explosive. No question about it. The other speculation—it isn't actually too

far-fetched—well, that would be the equivalent of instantaneous space-travel, wouldn't it?"

Fry shrugged. "I suppose so."

"However," Camhorn said, "we haven't transmitted even a speck of matter as yet. Not deliberately, at any rate. Do you know why, Gus?"

"No. How would I?"

"No rumors on that, eh? I'll tell you. Ym-400, when activated even in microquantities, immediately initiates the most perverse, incalculable effects ever to confront an experimenter. There has been, flatly, no explanation for them. I've had ordinarily unimpressible physicists tell me with tears in their eyes that space-time is malevolently conscious of us, and of our attempts to manipulate it—that it delights in frustrating those attempts."

Gus Fry grinned sourly. "Perhaps they're right."

"As it happens," Camhorn observed, "the situation is very unfunny, Gus. Experiments with Ym-400 have, to date, produced no useful results—and have produced over eleven hundred casualties. Most of the latter were highly trained men and women, not easily replaced."

Fry studied him incredulously. "You say these accidents have not been explained?"

Camhorn shook his head. "If they were explicable after the

event," he said, "very few of them would have happened in the first place. I assure you there's been nothing sloppy about the manner in which the project has been conducted, Gus. But as it stands today, it's a flop. If the stakes were less high, it would have been washed out ten years ago. And, as I said before, if there were reason to believe that the stable compound was involved in the disappearance of a space transport, we probably would postpone further operations indefinitely. One such occurrence would raise the risks to the intolerable level."

Fry grunted. "Is that what those accidents were like? Things—people—disappear?"

"Well . . . some of them were of that general nature."

Fry cleared his throat. "Just tell me one more thing, Howard."

"What's that?"

"Has any part of what you've said so far been the truth?"

Camhorn hesitated an instant. "Gus," he said then, "can you erase your question and my reply from the recording?"

"Of course."

"Erase them, please. Then blank out our further conversation."

A FEW seconds later, Fry said, "All right. You're off the record."

"Most of what I told you was the truth," Camhorn said, leaning back in his chair. "Perhaps not all of it. And perhaps I haven't told you the whole truth. But we're out to spread some plausible rumors, Gus. We could not afford to get caught in obvious lies."

Fry reddened slowly. "You feel the Interstellar Police Authority will spread those rumors?"

"Of course it will. Be realistic, Gus. Naturally, you'll transmit the information I've given you only to qualified personnel. But there'll be leaks, and . . . well, what better authentication can we have for a rumor than precisely such a source?"

"If you know of any potential leaks among the IPA's 'qualified personnel,'" Fry said, "I'd appreciate seeing the names."

"Don't be stuffy, Gus," Camhorn said affably. "We're not slandering the Authority. We're banking on the law of averages. As you've indicated, the IPA can't be expected to carry out this investigation unless it's given some clues to work on. We're giving it those clues. In the process, we expect to start the spread of certain rumors. That's all to the good."

"But what's the purpose?"

"I've told you that. Our criminals may or may not be caught as quickly as we'd like. The

group actually in the know may be—probably is—quite small. But they should have a widespread organization, and they'll be alert for counteraction now. They certainly will get the information we want them to have, whether it comes to them through the IPA or through some other channel; and that should be enough to keep them from committing any obvious stupidities. Meanwhile, we'll have avoided making the information public.

"We want to make sure they know—if they don't already know it—that Ym-400 is unpredictably dangerous. That leaves them with several choices of action. They can abandon those two thirty-four kilogram cases, or simply keep them concealed until they obtain more complete information about the material. Considering the manner in which the theft was prepared and carried out, neither is a likely possibility. These people are not ignorant, and they aren't easily frightened—and they certainly have the resources to handle any expense factor."

Fry nodded.

"The probability is," Camhorn went on, "that they'll evaluate the warning contained in these rumors realistically, but proceed with experimentation—perhaps more cautiously than they would have done otherwise.

"Which is as much as we hope to accomplish. I've told you of the losses among our personnel. We have no real objection to seeing someone else attempt to pull a few chestnuts out of the fire for us. That's the secondary purpose of sacrificing some quite valid information. By the time we catch up with our friends, we expect the sacrifice will have been—in one way or another—to our advantage."

"And suppose," said Fry, "that their secret experiments with Ym-400 result in turning another planet into an asteroid cloud?"

"That's an extreme possibility," Camhorn said, "though it exists. The point is that it exists now whatever we choose to do about it. We can only attempt to minimize the risks."

"You'd still sooner catch them before they start playing around with the stuff?"

"Of course we would. But we're working against time there."

HOW much time do we have before the thing gets critical?"

"Well," said Camhorn, "assume they've had at least four or five years to prepare for the day when they could bring a quantity of Ym-400 into their possession. They'll have made every necessary arrangement for con-

cealed full-scale experimentation. But, unless they are utterly reckless, they still have to conduct a thorough preliminary investigation of the compound and its possibilities. That phase of the matter shouldn't be too dangerous, and it can't be concluded in less than six months."

Fry shook his head exasperatedly. "Six months!" he said. "We might get lucky and pick them up next week, Howard . . . but there are eighteen planets and planet-class satellites at peak population levels, seventy-three space cities with a total of eight times the planetary populations, five Freeholder planets on each of which you could keep an army concealed indefinitely if you wanted to go to the trouble. Add in close to a hundred thousand splinter populations on semihabitables, asteroids, spaceborne in fixed stations and mobile craft—we can't do it, Howard! Not in six months. We've already started putting anyone who might have the slightest connection with that space transport job through the strainer, and we'll get on your lists of suspects as soon as they're placed in our hands."

"But don't expect results in anything less than a year. . . ."

* * *

Fry, for once, had been too optimistic.

A year and a half went by.

Endless series of more or less promising leads were run into the ground. The missing Ym-400 didn't turn up.

The IPA put out its nets again, and began to check over the possibilities that were left.

* * *

SEEN from the air, Lion Mesa, in the southwest section of the American continent on the Freehold Planet of Terra, was a tilted, roughly triangular tableland, furred green with thick clusters of cedar and pinyon, scarred by outcroppings of naked rock. It was eight miles across at its widest and highest point, directly behind an upthrust mass of stone jutting toward the north and somewhat suggestive of the short lifted neck and heavy skull of a listening beast. Presumably it was this unusual formation which gave the mesa its name. From there the ground dropped to the south, narrowing gradually to the third point of the triangle. Near the southern tip in cleared ground were the only evidences of human habitation—half a dozen buildings of small to moderate size, handsomely patterned in wood and native stone. Directly adjoining one of the buildings was a large, massively fenced double corral. This was an experimental animal ranch; it and the mesa plus half a hundred square miles of surrounding wasteland and moun-

tain were the private property of one Miguel Trelawney, Terrestrial Freeholder.

For the past twenty minutes, Frank Dowland—Lieutenant Frank Dowland, of the Solar Police Authority—had kept his grid-car moving slowly along the edges of a cloud bank west of the mesa, at an unobtrusive height above it. During that time, he was inspecting the ranch area in the beam of a high-powered hunting-scope. He had detected no activity, and the ranch had the general appearance of being temporarily deserted, which might be the case. Miguel Trelawney's present whereabouts were not known, and Lion Mesa was only one of the large number of places in which he was periodically to be found.

Dowland put the scope down finally, glanced at the sun which was within an hour of setting. He was a stocky man in his early thirties, strongly built, dressed in hunting clothes. The packed equipment in the grid-car, except for a few special items, was that of a collector of live game, the role regularly assumed by Dowland when at work on the planet. The Freeholder Families traditionally resented any indication of Overgovernment authority on Terra, and would have been singularly uncordial to a Solar City police detective here, regardless of the nature of his

mission. But the export of surplus native fauna was one of the forms of trade toward which they were tolerant. Moreover, they were hunting buffs themselves. Dowland ordinarily got along well enough with them.

He now opened a concealed compartment in the car's instrument panel, and brought out a set of pictures of Trelawney's ranch on the mesa, taken from an apparent distance of a few hundred yards above it. For some seconds, Dowland compared the depth photographs with the scene he had been observing. There appeared to have been no changes in any of the structures in the eight months since the pictures were taken. At least not above ground.

Dowland rubbed the side of his nose, scowling slightly. If the ranch really was deserted, it would be best to leave it alone for the time being and search elsewhere for Trelawney. To go down uninvited in the absence of the owner would be as much out of character for an experienced visitor on Terra as for a Freeholder. If observed at it—a remote possibility perhaps in this area, but the possibility was there—he could offer the excuse of a suspicion of engine trouble in the grid-car. The excuse would be good, once. He preferred to reserve it as a means of introducing himself to the Trelawneys

when he caught up with them—either Miguel, the current head of the dwindled family, or Miguel's younger half-brother, Dr. Paul Trelawney. Neither rated as a serious suspect in the matter of the Overgovernment's missing Ym-400, but it had been a little difficult to find out what they had been doing with themselves during the past year and a half. Dowland's assignment was to find out, and to do it unobtrusively. Strictly routine.

TERRA, in terms of the YM search, hadn't seemed like too bad a bet at first. The Freeholders entertained an open grudge against the Overgovernment, which had restricted their nominally unclouded title to the planet by somewhat underhanded legal means, when the principle of the Freehold Worlds was laid down. Essentially, the Families became the very highly paid caretakers of Terra. To Dowland, raised in the crowded tunnels of the system of artificial giant asteroids known as Solar City, the conservation of the natural resources of a living world looked like a good idea. The Terran Families were interested in conservation, but on their terms and under their control. The Overgovernment politely refused.

That was one part of it. The other was that numerous contentious factions in the space cities

and on the so-called open worlds wanted to spill over on the Freeholder planets. Again the Overgovernment refused, and again it made sense to Dowland. But the Freeholders feared—perhaps with justification, so far as Dowland could tell—that political pressures would mount with each increase in excess population and eventually lead to such measures. Many of them, probably the majority, led by Anthony Brand Carter—Firebrand Carter, head of the largest and wealthiest of the Families—believed that the only safe solution was to arm the planet. They wanted heavy weapons, and enough of them: the right to build them, to man them and, if necessary, to use them to beat off encroaching groups. The Overgovernment pointed out that the possession and use of major implements of war was by law its own exclusive privilege. Litigation on the matter had gone on for decades, was periodically renewed by Carter and his associates. Meanwhile, many of Terra's sportsmen became members of an extremely able-bodied group called Carter's Troopers, and assiduously practiced the skills of battle with the means allowed them. Dowland and the Solar Police Authority knew the Troopers were crack shots, excellent fliers and horsemen, but the Overgovernment was not worrying about it at present.

Mr. Paul Trelawney, the younger of the brothers, had been a Trooper for two years while in his twenties, then had quarreled violently with Firebrand Carter, had left Terra to major in physics at the Overgovernment's universities, and presently received his degree. What he had done after that wasn't known. He appeared occasionally on Terra, might be here at present. Miguel, Paul's senior by almost twenty years, now in his early fifties, had also taken an interest in physics, attending an Overgovernment university a quarter of a century earlier. Miguel's studies terminated before he obtained a degree, as a result of a difference of opinion with the president of the university, whom he challenged to a duel. The records of both brothers indicated, in Dowland's opinion, more than a trace of the megalomania not too uncommon among men with excessive wealth and no real claim to distinction. But, in spite of their choice of studies, there was nothing to link either Trelawney to the missing YM. Mental brilliance might have made them suspect; but their I.Q. readings, while definitely better than average—a number of notches above Dowland's own, for that matter—were not outstanding. Their scholastic performance had been of comparative qual-

ity. Miguel, on his return to Terra, had dropped physics in favor of experimental biology. The ranch on Lion Mesa was adapted to his hobby, which at the moment was directed to the production of a strain of gigantic wild hogs for hunting purposes. Presumably the breeding of bad-tempered tons of bacon on the hoof satisfied his urge to distinguish himself as a gentleman scientist. Aside from Paul's brief connection with Carter's Troopers neither brother had shown any interest in Terran politics.

RATHER poor prospects, but Dowland's information was that after a year and a half the better prospects were regarded as nearly exhausted, and hadn't produced the slightest results, putting the various divisions of the Interstellar Police Authority in the discouraging position of now having to suspect almost anybody. If there was no sign of Miguel Trelawney's presence here by sundown, he decided, he would move on to the next check point. Trelawney's pets would be cared for by automatic machinery; it might be several weeks before their owner showed up to look them over.

His gaze shifted briefly around the plain out of which the mesa loomed. It was turbulent today; gusty winds shook the car and

electric storms were boiling along the northern mountain ranges. Below, sand and dust whirled up the mesa's steep flanks. Picking up the hunting-scope again, Dowland began moving the visibeam almost at random and with low magnification over the back of the tableland. Dense masses of trees swept past, shouldered aside here and there by wind-scarred rock. A thoroughly wild place. He brought the glasses back to the ranch area, suddenly checked them there. . . .

Somebody was in sight, moving toward the edge of the mesa nearest him. He caught a flash of something white. Centering carefully on the figure, Dowland turned on full magnification, and in the lenses, the image of a young woman appeared at close-up range.

She had come to a stop; and for an instant Dowland was startled to realize she was peering back at him through a pair of binoculars. But lacking the visibeam of the IPA, her glasses couldn't, of course, do much more than show her there was a grid-car up there. Now her free hand lifted the long white cloth it was holding, and began swinging it in swift, vigorous gestures through the air above her head.

In spite of the binoculars, Dowland was immediately sure of the woman's identity—hav-

ing, in the past few days, studied a number of pictures of her. She was Jill Trelawney, the youngest of the three surviving members of the Trelawney Freeholders. Miguel and Paul were her uncles—and if she was here, one or the other of the men must certainly be here also.

It was obvious that she was signaling to the car. Dowland glanced at the communicator in the panel before him, saw it was turned on but registering no local calls. His eyes narrowed with speculation. This suddenly looked just a little bit interesting. If the Trelawneys were expecting a visitor but preferred not to address him over the open communication system, it indicated that they intended to be hard to find.

Which might mean a number of things of no interest at all to the IPA. But . . .

Dowland took his police gun from the pocket of his hunting jacket, and began checking it by touch, as he swung the car's nose about toward the ranch and went slanting down toward the air. Either of the brothers might decide to make trouble, particularly if they had something to conceal—but, at any rate, they couldn't claim he hadn't been invited down.

Picking up the girl in the scope again, he saw that she realized he was coming in. She

had dropped the cloth but was still gazing up toward the car, her free hand shielding her eyes from the setting sun.

In the next instant, without the slightest preliminary warning, every instrument in the panel before Dowland went dead. Then the grid-car began to drop like a stone.

* * *

THE world-wide gravity grid was Terra's general power source. It had been an idiotically expensive installation; actually, no other planet could have afforded it at present. Once installed, it was drawn on for idiotically minor services. There weren't enough human beings on Terra to begin to make a significant use of the grid.

But there were compensating features. The grid was esthetically unobtrusive, and available everywhere. It supplied power for anything from personal wrist watches on up through the giant docking machines at the spaceports. And it was reliable. There had been no power failures and no accidents connected with the grid recorded in its eighty years of operation.

That shining safety record, Dowland thought, manipulating the flight controls with desperate haste, might become seriously marred in something like three-quarters of a minute now. He'd

be lucky to get down alive. And another thought was clamoring for a different kind of action with almost equal urgency—unusual and unexplained physical phenomena of any kind were one of the things the YM searchers were alerted to look out for; and he'd certainly run into one of them here. He shot a glance down to his camouflaged wrist communicator. Just a few seconds to spare, and he could get a private-beam alarm in to the Solar Police Authority representative at the Columbia spaceport.

He didn't have a few seconds to spare. The gird-car was a lousy glider—ponderous, sickeningly slow to respond. The rim of the mesa swayed up. If he missed that stretch of cleared ground around the Trelawney ranch, the car would either tear itself to pieces in the forest beyond or do a ditch into the piled rubble at the mesa's foot. He hauled back on the controls again, felt the car actually begin to rise for an instant—

"I'm sorry," Jill Trelawney was crying, running up the slope toward him. "I'm so terribly sorry. I tried to warn you. I simply didn't realize—are you hurt?"

Her face, Dowland thought, was probably no whiter than his own. The canopy had caved in around him, and a jagged chunk

of engine was nestling in the passenger seat to his right. As he tried to stand up, a section of the plastic floorboard collapsed; his foot followed it through and struck solid ground. He worked himself out of the seat. The grid-car creaked tiredly and settled another six inches. Dowland shoved a piece of canopy aside and found he could straighten out.

He cleared his throat. "I don't think I'm hurt. Anyway, not much."

"Your face—it's bleeding!"

Dowland probed at a cut lip with his tongue and winced. "Didn't notice it happen . . . a lot of stuff flying around there for a moment. Now, just what's going on?"

The girl swallowed nervously, staring at him. "The power's off."

"That I noticed." Something occurred to Dowland. "That's why you couldn't call me on the communicator."

"Yes. I . . ."

"How long has it been off here?"

"Since this morning."

He looked at her thoughtfully, and a quick flush spread up into her face. "I know," she said. "It was terribly stupid of me to—to get you to come down. It just didn't occur to me that . . ."

"It's all right," Dowland said. "I'm here now." She was very

good-looking, though her face was strained at the moment. Strained and scared. "You could not know how far the failure area extended." He glanced over at the buildings. The crash of his landing hadn't brought anyone into sight. "You're not alone here, are you?"

"No." She hesitated, went on half apologetically, "I'm sure I should remember you, but I don't."

"Well, you wouldn't," Dowland said. "I'm not a Freeholder."

THE flicker of reaction in her eyes brought a prickling to the hairs at the back of his neck. The thing looked hot, all right. He continued, "You just may have heard of me by name, though. Frank Dowland, of Dowland Animal Exports."

"Oh, yes." Apparently she did recognize the name. "I'm Jill Trelawney, Dowland. I . . . there's been an accident. A bad one, I'm afraid."

"Another accident? What kind?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. Do you have a medical kit with you?"

"Of course. Who's hurt?"

"My uncle. Miguel Trelawney. He's up in the house."

"What's wrong with him?"

"That's what I don't know. looks—I think he's terribly sick. In some way."

"How long has he been sick?"

She hesitated. "This morning."

"Since the time the grid-power went off?"

Jill looked startled. "Why, yes."

And that about cinched it, Dowland thought. He said, "You two were alone here?"

"No. I'm sure this all sounds very crazy, but—" She nodded at one of the buildings down the slope from them, a long wooden structure identified as a feed barn in Dowland's pictures of the ranch. "My other uncle, Paul Trelawney—he's locked up in there."

"Locked up?" Dowland repeated.

"Yes. There's a key to the door somewhere, but I can't find it."

"Would Miguel know where it is?"

"I think so."

"Then we'll try to get him conscious again at least long enough to tell us. You'd better get back to the house, Miss Trelawney. I'll dig out the kit. Be up there in a minute."

He watched the tall supple figure start back across the slope, shook his head a little, and turned to the wrecked car. She was either somewhat stupid, or being cagey with a non-Terran. The last seemed a little more likely. Too bad if she turned out to be involved with

something like the YM business, but that was out of his hands. He'd have to report immediately, and the Over-government specialists would be here in an hour. It wasn't his job.

He climbed cautiously back into the car. Out of sight of the house, he pressed a key on the wrist communicator, said, "Chris? This is Dowland. Emergency," and waited for the hum of response from the instrument.

There was no hum.

Half a minute later, he had the communicator off his wrist and opened. He couldn't remember having struck his wrist hard enough against anything to have damaged it, but the delicate mechanisms inside were a crystal shambles. There was a portable communicator packed in with his camping equipment. But it operated on grid power.

It looked like it was going to remain his job for a while, after all.

* * *

MIGUEL Trelawney, in Dowland's unvoiced opinion, was a man who was dying. He was big-boned and heavily muscled, but on the low couch in the living room he looked shrunken. Lead-colored skin and thready pulse. Internal bleeding at a guess—an informed layman's guess. Radiation burns.

Dowland looked over at the girl. She was disturbed and tense, but nowhere near hysteria. "We might bring him around," he said bluntly. "But it will take some hours at least. He's in bad shape."

Her hands, clasped together in her lap, went white around the knuckles. "Will he . . . can you save . . ."

Dowland shook his head. "I don't know if we can save him here. If we got him to one of your hospitals tonight, he should have a very good chance. But we can't do that—unless the grid-power cuts in again."

She said faintly, "What's happened to him?"

"Lady, that's fairly obvious. He's been ray-burned."

"Ray-burned? But how?"

"I wouldn't know." Dowland opened the medical kit, slid out several of the tiny containers, turned one of them over in his hand. He asked, "Where was he when you found him?"

"Lying outside the door of the lab."

"Lab?"

Jill Trelawney bit her lip. "The building I showed you."

"Where Paul Trelawney's locked up?"

"Yes. They call it a lab."

"Who are they?"

"Miguel and Paul."

"What kind of lab is it?" Dowland asked absently.

"I don't know. They're building something there. Some sort of a machine."

"Are your uncles scientists?"

"Yes." Her tone had begun to harden—a Freeholder lady rebuffing a non-Terran's prying.

Dowland said, "If we knew whether they had radiation suits in that lab . . ."

"I believe they do."

He nodded. "That might account for Miguel."

He took a minute hypodermic syringe from the kit, inserted the needle through a penetration point on the container he had selected, filled it slowly. Jill stirred uneasily, asked, "What are you giving him?"

Dowland glanced over at her. "I don't know exactly. The brand name's 'medic.' There are around thirty other names for what's probably the same preparation. They're all very popular wherever good doctors and good hospitals aren't readily available. I haven't run into medic on Terra, but I bring along my own supply."

"What will it do for him?"

"Well, as I understand it, as soon as I inject this into his arm, it will spread through his body and start looking things over. Medic appears to know what a healthy human body should be like. So it diagnoses what's wrong—cold symptoms, burned-out lung, hangover, broken ankle

—and then tries to bring the situation back to normal."

HE SLID up Miguel Trelawney's sleeve, inserted the needle tip into the thick, flaccid biceps, slowly depressed the plunger. "Medic's supposed to be in the class of a virus—a very well-intentioned virus when it comes to human beings." He removed the needle, glanced at his watch. "Almost six-thirty . . . A hangover'd get knocked out in three minutes. But judging from the condition your uncle seems to be in, it might be four or five hours now before the stuff really begins to take hold with him. If it can bring him back to consciousness by itself, it probably won't happen much before morning. Might be earlier; but I don't think we should wait for that before trying to get your Uncle Paul out of the lab. If he hasn't come out on his own, he may be in the same shape as Miguel. Or worse."

Jill's face paled slightly. "Yes. I've been thinking of that."

Dowland stood looking down at her, chewing on his lower lip. "You know, Miss Trelawney, there's something very odd about the fact that you found Miguel lying outside the lab when the door was locked."

She nodded. "I know. I don't have any explanation for it."

"Isn't there a storeroom of

some kind around—where they might be keeping radiation suits, for instance?”

“The ranch storehouse is the small square building just south of here. I went through it this morning looking for a key to the lab. There aren’t any radiation suits there.”

“You know what those suits look like?”

“Yes. I’ve worn them when taking part in attack drills.”

“Would you recognize the lab key if you saw it?”

“Yes. Miguel showed me the one he usually carries with him.” She got up, went over to the mantle above the fireplace, took down a circular wedge of metal, a half-inch thick, with smoothly beveled rim. She handed it to Dowland. “The key is very similar to this one, but at least three times as large.”

Dowland hefted the object shook his head. “Lady, by the weight of it, this thing’s metasteel. The stuff they use for bank vaults and the hulls of battleships. And it looks as if the door to your uncles’ laboratory has an atomic lock because that’s what this type of key is made for. Do you know if the building’s lined with steel inside?”

“It might be. Miguel told me that it had been extremely expensive to build, that he had wanted to make sure no one could get into it while he was away.”

“If it’s built of metasteel, he’s done just that,” Dowland said. “And that makes it tough.” He looked at the key in his hand. “What does this key fit into?”

“I don’t know. But I’m sure there’s no other door on the ranch that has an—an atomic lock. I found the key in Miguel’s pocket this morning.”

“Well, it’s probably no good to us,” Dowland said. “Now look, Miss Trelawney. I’m carrying a protection gun that can be stepped up to around six times the shock power of a heavy rifle slug. I’ll try that out at full charge on the lock to the lab, and then around the walls. But if it’s all metasteel, shooting at it won’t get us anywhere. Then we might make another search for that key. Or I could try getting down off the mesa to get help.”

Jill looked doubtful. “There’s no easy way down off the mesa even in daylight. And at night it would be worse.”

Dowland said, “That part of it won’t be too much of a problem. I brought mountaineering equipment along this trip—planned to pick up a Marco Polo ram and a few ewes—piton gun, clamp pitons, half-mile of magnetic rope; the works. Question is, how much good will it do? I’ve got a camp communicator, but it’s grid-powered, and we don’t know how far the power failure extends around here at

ground level. Is there anyone down in the plain we could contact? They might have horses."

She shook her head. "I would have heard of that. You could wander around there for weeks before you were seen."

Dowland was silent a moment. "Well," he said, "it should be worth a try if we can't accomplish anything within another few hours. Judging from my car's position when its power went off, it shouldn't really be more than a ten-mile hike from the bottom of the mesa before I can start using the communicator. But, of course, it will take up a lot of time. So we'll see what we can do here first."

He slipped his jacket on. "You'd better stay with your uncle, Miss Trelawney. I—"

He interrupted himself. An unearthly din had begun suddenly outside the house—whistling squeals, then an angry ear-shattering noise somewhere between a howl and a roar. The girl started, then smiled nervously. Dowland asked, "What is *that*?"

"Miguel's pigs. I expect they're simply hungry. The feeding equipment in the animal house isn't operating either, of course."

"Pigs? I've heard pigs make a racket, but never anything like that."

"These," said Jill, "are rather large. My uncle is interested in

experimental breeding. I understand the biggest tusker weighs nearly two tons. They're alarming beasts. Miguel's the only one who can get close to the boar."

OUTSIDE it was early evening, still light, but Dowland went first to the wrecked grid-car to get a flashlight. He'd need it during the night, might even need it immediately if he found he could force an entry into the laboratory. In that case—if the building wasn't meta-steel after all—he probably would find no YM inside it. Which, Dowland admitted to himself, would be entirely all right with him.

But he was reasonably certain it was there. The Overgovernment's instructions about what to watch for remained annoyingly indefinite, but uniformly they stressed the unusual, in particular when associated with the disastrous. And so far, that described the situation here. The large and uncomfortable question was what kind of disaster might be about to erupt next.

There were other questions, somewhat too many of them at the moment. But the one he wanted answered immediately concerned Jill Trelawney's role. There was a guaranteed way of getting the information from her, but he had to be sure she wasn't as innocent as she acted

before resorting to it. At the very least, he had to establish that the activities in the laboratory constituted some serious violation of Overgovernment law—even if not directly connected with YM—and that the girl knew about it. Otherwise, the whole present pattern of the Ym-400 search on Terra might become very obvious to all interested parties.

He thought he had a method of forcing Jill's hand. If she had guilty knowledge, she might consider a non-Terran animal trader, who'd just happened to drop in, literally, a convenient tool to use in this emergency. She wanted to get help, too, though not from the Solar Police Authority. The Trelawneys couldn't possibly be alone in this thing.

But she couldn't, if guilty, take the chance of trying to make use of an Overgovernment cop. A policeman wouldn't be here at this particular moment by accident. There was some risk in revealing himself—she might react too hastily—but not much risk, Dowland thought. From what he'd seen of her, she'd use her head. She'd make sure of him.

The uproar from the animal building lessened as he went back across the slope to the entrance of the lab. Miguel's beasts might have caught his footsteps,

and started to listen to see if he was coming in. The outer door to the lab—a frame of the weather-proofed wood that covered the building—stood slightly open. Dowland pulled it back, looked for a moment at the slab of metasteel behind it, and at the circular depression in the slab which was the atomic lock.

In character, so far. Three windows at the back of the house where he had left Jill Trelawney with Miguel overlooked the lab area. Guilty or not, she'd be watching him from behind one of those windows, though she mightn't have come to any conclusions about him as yet. The reference to his "protection" gun had been a definite give-away; he'd described an IPA police automatic, and that was a weapon civilians didn't carry—or didn't mention to strangers if they happened to carry them.

But a Freeholder lady might not know about that.

She couldn't avoid noticing the implications of an IPA anti-radiation field. . . .

DOWLAND moved thirty steps back from the door, took out his gun, and pressed a stud on the side of his belt. Immediately, a faint blue glow appeared about him. Not too pronounced a glow even on the darkening slope, but quite visible to anyone watching from one of the windows. He

took a deep breath, sucking air in through the minor hampering effect of the field.

The rest was a matter of carrying through with the act. He'd known from the instant of looking at the door that he was wasting his fire on metasteel. But he slammed a few shots into the five-inch target of the lock, then worked his way methodically about the building, watching the weatherproofing shatter away from an unmarred silvery surface beneath. The gun made very little noise, but Miguel's hogs were screaming themselves hoarse again by the time he was finished.

Dowland switched off the AR field, and went back to the house. When he came along the short entrance hall, she was waiting for him, standing half across the living room, hands clasped behind her back. She looked at him questioningly.

"No luck, Dowland?"

Dowland shook his head. "Not a bit." He started to shrug the jacket from his shoulders, saw her dart the gun out from behind her, and turned his left hand slightly, squeezing down on the black elastic capsule he was holding between thumb and forefinger. Jill probably never noticed the motion, certainly did not see or feel the tiny needle that flashed from the capsule and buried itself in the front of

her thigh. Shocked bewilderment showed for an instant on her face; then her knees gave way, the gun dropped from her hand. She went down slowly, turned over on her side on the thick carpet, and lay still.

Well, Dowland thought, he had his proof. . . .

Jill Trelawney opened her eyes again about five minutes later. She made a brief effort to get out of the deep armchair in which she found herself, then gave that up. The dark blue eyes fastened on Dowland, standing before the chair. He saw alarm and anger in them; then a cold watchfulness.

"What did you do?" she asked huskily.

"I shot first," Dowland said. "It seemed like a good idea."

Her glance shifted to Miguel on the couch across the room.

"How long was I unconscious?"

"Just a few minutes."

"And why. . . ." She hesitated.

"Why are you feeling so weak? You've absorbed a shot of a special little drug, Miss Trelawney. It does two things that are very useful under certain circumstances. One of them is that it keeps the recipient from carrying out any sudden or vigorous action. You might, for example, be able to get out of that chair if you tried hard enough.

But you'd find yourself lying on the carpet then. Perhaps you'd be able too get up on your hands and knees. You might even start crawling from the room—but you'd do it very slowly."

DOWLAND paused. "And the other thing the drug does is to put the person into an agreeable frame of mind, even when he'd rather not be agreeable. He becomes entirely cooperative. For example, you'll find yourself quite willing to answer questions I ask."

"So you *are* a police investigator," she said evenly.

"That's right." Dowland swung another chair around beside him, and sat down facing her. "Let's not waste any more time, Miss Trelawney. Were you going to shoot me just now?"

She looked briefly surprised.

"No," she said. "Not unless you forced me to it. I was going to disarm you and lock you in a cellar downstairs. You would have been safe there as long as was necessary."

"How long would that be?"

"Until I get help."

"Help from whom?"

Angry red flared about Jill's cheekbones. "This is incredible!" she said softly. "Help from Carter."

"Firebrand Carter?" Dowland asked.

"Yes."

"He's associated with your uncles?"

"Yes."

"Who heads the group?"

"Miguel and Carter head it together. They're very close friends."

"And who else is in it—besides Paul and yourself?"

She shook her head. "There must be quite a few people in it, but I don't know their names. We feel it's best if we know as little as possible about one another at present."

"I see. But they're all Terran Freeholders?"

"Yes, of course."

"How did you happen to be told about Carter?"

"In case of an emergency here, I'm to contact him on a tight-beam number."

"And just what," Dowland asked, "have your uncles been doing here?"

"Building a machine that will enable them to move back through time."

"With the help of Ym-400?"

"Yes."

* * *

DOWLAND stared at her thoughtfully, feeling a little chilled. She believed it, of course; she was incapable of lying now. But he didn't believe it. He'd heard that some Overgovernment scientists considered



time-travel to be possible. It was a concept that simply had no reality for him.

But he thought of the rumors about YM—and of Miguel found lying inexplicably outside the laboratory building. He asked carefully, "Have they completed the machine?"

"Yes. They were making the first full-scale test of it this morning—and they must have been at least partly successful."

"Because of Miguel?"

"Yes."

"You feel," Dowland said, "that Miguel first went somewhere else—or somewhen else, let's say—and then came back and wound up a little bit away from where he'd started?"

"Yes."

"Any idea of how he was hurt?"

The girl shook her head. "The grid-power failure shows there was an accident of some kind, of course. But I can't imagine what it was."

"What about Paul? Do you think he's still in the lab?"

"Not unless he's also injured—or dead."

Dowland felt the chill again. "You think he may be in some other time at this moment?"

"Yes."

"And that he'll be back?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe that machine?" he asked.

"No. I've never seen the plans, and wouldn't understand them if I did. And I've never been inside the lab."

"I see. Do you have any reason, aside from the way Miguel reappeared, to think that the test was a partial success?"

"Yes. At three different times since this morning I've heard the sounds of a river flowing under the house."

"You heard what?" Dowland said.

"A river flowing under the house. The noises were quite unmistakable. They lasted for about thirty minutes on each occasion."

"What would that indicate?" he asked.

"Well, obviously . . . this time period and another one—the one in which that river flows—have drawn close to each other. But the contact is impermanent or imperfect at present."

"Is that the way the machine is supposed to operate?"

"I don't know how the machine is supposed to operate," Jill Trelawney said. "But that's what seems to have happened."

Dowland studied her face for a moment. "All right," he said then, "let's leave it for now. Who developed this machine?"

"Miguel did. Paul helped, in the later stages. Others have helped with specific details—I don't know who those other peo-

ple were. But essentially it was Miguel's project. He's been working on it for almost twenty years."

And that simply couldn't be true. Unless . . .

"Miss Trelawney," Dowland said, "do you know what Miguel's I.Q. reading is?"

"Of course. It's 192."

"And Paul's?"

"189." She smiled. "You're going to ask whether they faked lower levels when they were tested by the university authorities. Yes, they did. This thing has been prepared for a long time, Dowland."

"What's your own I.Q., Miss Trelawney?"

"181."

HER dossier I.Q., based on records of her known activities and behavior, was an estimated 128. The Freeholders did seem to have planned very thoroughly for the success of this operation.

"Do you know who hijacked the Ym-400?" Dowland asked.

"Yes. Paul arranged for that."

"Have you seen the stuff yourself?"

"I have. Two small cases of blue ingots. A very dark blue. Individually, the ingots appear to be quite heavy, though they aren't very large."

That described exactly what the Overgovernment was looking

for. Dowland asked, "How much of it is in the laboratory?"

"It's all there."

He felt his scalp crawling. "All of it! Haven't your uncles heard that YM is an incredibly dangerous thing to play around with?"

"Of course. But Miguel examined it very carefully after it was obtained. If reasonable precautions are taken, there is no way in which it *can* become dangerous. The conclusion was that the Overgovernment has spread rumors as a bluff, to try to prevent the YM from being used."

"What's happened around here," Dowland said, "might indicate it wasn't a bluff."

"You're jumping to conclusions, Dowland. A great many other things may have gone wrong."

"Perhaps. But an I.Q. of 136 keeps telling me that we're in considerable danger at the moment."

Jill nodded. "That's very probably true."

"Then how about giving me your full cooperation until we—you, I, your uncles—are all safely out of this?"

"At the moment," Jill observed, "I don't appear to have a choice in the matter."

"I don't mean that. The drug will wear off in a few hours. You'll be able to move around freely again, and whether you

cooperate or not will depend on you. How will you feel about it then?"

"That depends," Jill said, "on whether we have reached an agreement."

"Agreement about what?"

"A price for your silence, and for any assistance you can give in keeping things quiet. You can, of course, set the price as high as you wish. Terra will meet it."

Dowland stared at her, somewhat astounded. It was as cold-blooded an attempt at bargaining as he'd run into, considering the circumstances. And—considering an I.Q. of 181—it seemed rather unrealistic. "Miss Trelawney," he said, "the only thing silence might get me is a twenty-year stretch in an IPA pen. I'm not quite that foolish."

"You're also not aware of the true situation."

"All right," Dowland said, "what is it?"

"Miguel and Paul have earned the right to carry out the first of these tests. They may not complete it. But duplicates of their machine in the laboratory are concealed about the planet, waiting to be put into action by other teams of Freeholder scientists. You see? The tests will be continued until any problems connected with shifting back through time are recognized and overcome."

Dowland said, "Then why is the entire haul of YM stacked away in the laboratory here?"

"Because that's where it's to be used at present. You still don't understand the extent of this operation, Dowland. If we need more of the Overgovernment's YM, we'll simply take it. It can be done at any time. The only way the Overgovernment could really prevent future raids would be by destroying its supplies of YM-400. And it isn't going to do that—at least not before we've obtained as much as we can use."

AS FAR as his own information went, she could be right, Dowland thought. He said, "So supposing some Freeholder scientists do succeed eventually in traveling back in time. What will that accomplish?"

"Everything we want, of course," Jill said. "There'll be no more reason to conceal our activities—and we'll have *time*. As much time as we need. Thirty or fifty years perhaps. Scientific centers and automatic factories will be set up in the past, and eventually the factories will be turning out weapons superior to anything the Overgovernment has. And then the weapons will come to the present—to *this* present, Dowland. Within a year from now, Terra will have become a heavily armed world—

overnight. There'll be no more talk then of forcing us to remain under Overgovernment rule. Or of making Terra another Open Planet. . . ."

Theoretically, Dowland could see that such a plan might work. With the time to do it in, and the resources of a world at the Freeholders' disposal . . . and there would be nothing to keep them from taking back spaceships and mining the asteroids. For a moment, while Jill Trelawney was talking, she had made it sound almost plausible.

Only for a moment. She was, of course, telling the truth as she knew it. They were up to something very dangerous—and very illegal—here, whatever it was, and they'd spread the time travel idea around among the lesser members of the group to help keep the real purpose concealed. He said, "Just how far back in time are they planning to go, Miss Trelawney?"

"Six hundred thousand years. The period is regarded as particularly suitable for what is being planned."

Six hundred thousand years. Nothing half-hearted about the Freeholders, Dowland thought sardonically, even as to the size of the lies they put out. "When you waved me in here this evening," he said. "I had the impression you were expecting someone else. Was I right?"

"Yes. But I wasn't waving you in, Dowland. I was attempting to wave you off. If you'd been the man I thought it was, you would have realized it. . . . Have you considered my suggestion?"

"About selling out to the Freeholders?"

"If you wish too call it that."

"Miss Trelawney," Dowland said amiably, "if I did sell out, would you admire me for it?"

Her cheeks flushed. "No. You'd be despicable, of course."

Dowland nodded. "That's one thing we agree on. Now, just who was this man you were expecting, and just why were you expecting him?"

The girl's lips twisted reluctantly for a moment; then words broke out again. "Carter is to send a man to the ranch with some pieces of equipment. The equipment either was unloaded at Columbia spaceport this afternoon, or will be, early tomorrow morning. I thought you were the messenger. Strange grid-cars don't come through this area more than once every few weeks. If you'd been the man, you would already have attempted to call our house communicator by the time I saw you. . . ."

"To make sure the coast was clear before coming in with odd-looking equipment"

"Yes. You would then have reported to Carter that there

was no answer, which would have resulted in an immediate investigation. I was attempting to warn the messenger that he shouldn't come closer, that something was seriously wrong here."

Dowland reflected, nodded. "That would have worked—if I'd been the man. And now it seems it's a good thing I inquired about this, Miss Trelawney. Because the messenger actually may have arrived this evening, received no answer from the ranch, reported the fact, and gone away again—mightn't he?"

"Yes, that may have happened." Her eyes were furious with frustration.

"And what would Carter do then?"

"He would rush a few squads of Troopers here to investigate."

"Hedgehopping," Dowland nodded, "in approved Trooper style to avoid detection. They hit the power-failure area, and the first few cars crash. They report the matter. What would happen then, Miss Trelawney?"

"Damn you, Dowland. . . . They'd scout around Lion Mesa to see how close they could get by air. Carter would have horses and climbing equipment flown in to that point, and they'd continue on horseback."

THERE were other methods, Dowland thought. Parachutes, gliders—they could even

try ditching a few cars on the mesa as he'd done. He considered, and mentally shook his head. Aside from the difficulties, the Troopers would be warned to avoid spectacular stunts in the vicinity of the mesa. They'd come exactly as she'd said. It was a completely unobtrusive form of approach, even for a large body of men, and it would still get them here fast.

He said, "Well, let's suppose all that has happened. Carter's Troopers are on their way here at this minute, riding pellmell. Giving them every break, what's the earliest moment we can expect them to show up?"

She said, "Not before morning."

"I'd figured it at perhaps two hours before sunrise," Dowland said. "What would hold them up?"

"They can't climb the mesa at any point near the ranch by night. A descent might be possible, but even that would be difficult and dangerous. And they'll be carrying repair equipment to take care of whatever's gone wrong. So they'll have to come up the northern end, where it isn't so steep."

"And then," Dowland said, "they still have to come down across the mesa on foot. Makes sense. And, of course, that messenger actually may not get here before tomorrow. If he comes

then, at what time would he arrive?"

She shrugged. "Before noon.

The hour wasn't specified."

"In any case," Dowland said, "you were figuring on stalling me around here until Carter's boys turned up. Then you realized I must be an Overgovernment man, and decided it would be too dangerous to allow me to prowl about the ranch until help came."

Jill nodded.

Dowland considered her reflectively. "You understand, I believe, that unless I can somehow get word to the Solar Police Authority within the next few hours, Miguel's injuries may very well kill him? And that if I could get word out, an SPA jet would have him in the nearest hospital ten minutes later?"

"I understand both those things, Dowland," she said. "But I also know that Miguel would not choose to have his life saved at the cost of exposing our plans."

Dowland shrugged. "Very well . . . Now, were the things that happened before I got here as you've described them?"

"Yes."

"You know of no way to get into that laboratory at present?"

"Not unless you can find the key to the door."

"That key should be around this immediate area?"

"It should be," she said, "but I haven't been able to find it."

"No further ideas about that?"

"None."

Dowland was silent a moment. "Miss Trelawney," is there anything else that might be of importance here that you still have not told me?"

Her eyes studied him coldly. "Perhaps one thing . . ."

"And what's that?"

"If you had been willing to be bribed," Jill Trelawney said, "I should have asked the Troopers to shoot you."

* * *

THERE was a lady, Dowland was thinking a few minutes later, who was likely to be something of a problem to any man. However, she wouldn't be his problem for a considerable number of hours now. She had swallowed the sleep tablet he had given her without any trouble. After the drug wore off, the tablet would keep her quiet till around dawn.

He stood looking about the wind-swept darkened slopes of the ranch area. Clouds were moving past in the sky, but there would be intermittent moonlight. The conditions weren't too bad for the search he had in mind. There had to be a concealed storeroom about the place somewhere, in which the Trel-

awnings would keep assorted stuff connected with their secret work which they didn't want to have cluttering up the lab. Including, very likely, any spare keys to the lab. At a guess, neither of the brothers would have wanted Jill at Lion Mesa during this crucial and dangerous stage of the project. But they probably were used to letting their beautiful and headstrong niece do as she wanted. But they needn't have mentioned things like the storeroom to her. If he could keep his mind slightly off the fact that within a hundred yards or so of him there were sixty-eight kilograms of Ym-400—with an unspecified amount of it at present in its horrendous radioactive state—he should stand a fairly good chance of finding the storeroom.

And in that case, the half-inch atomic key Jill Trelawney had showed him, and which was at the moment weighing down his coat pocket, probably would turn out to be exactly what he needed to get into it.

He located the place just under an hour later. It was a matter partly of observation, partly of remembering a remark Jill had made. The building which housed the giant hogs adjoined a corral three times its size. Corral and building were divided into two sections, the larger one harboring six sows. The single

boar was in the other. A spider web of gangways led about above the huge stalls. It was the wall between building and corral which had drawn Dowland's attention by the fact that a little calculating indicated it was something like a yard thicker than was necessary.

He brought a dozen campfire sticks over from the grid-car and spaced them down the central gangway of the building, then deferred further inspection long enough to locate and trip the automatic feeding mechanisms. The hungry animal thunder which had greeted him at his entry ebbed away as they ate furiously and he studied them. They weren't the grotesque monstrosities he had expected but massive, sculptured giants with the quick, freewheeling agility of a rhinoceros, sand-colored, with wickedly intelligent eyes. There wasn't much question they'd make exciting game for anyone who enjoyed a touch of personal danger in the hunt.

The danger was more obviously there in the boar. The brute's eight hundred or so pounds of weight above that of the average of his prospective harem would not be significant when pitted against an opponent as physically inferior as a human being. His attitude might. The sows filed out into the corral after they had eaten what the feeding ma-

chine had thrown into them. The boar remained, watching Dowland on the gangway above him from the corner of one eye. The eye reflected no gratitude for the feeding. It was red-rimmed and angry. The jaw worked with a continuous chewing motion. There was a fringe of foam along the mouth.

Jill Trelawney had mentioned that no one but Miguel could come near the boar.

Dowland could believe it. A small steel ladder led down from the gangway into the brute's stall. Dowland reached into his pocket and brought out the IPA gun. No sportsman would have considered using it against an animal. But this wasn't sport. He started down the ladder.

THE boar stood motionless, watching him. Dowland stopped at the foot of the ladder. After a moment, he took a step forward. The boar pivoted and came thundering across the floor of the stall, head low. The gun made its soft, heavy sound, and Dowland leaped aside. The huge body that slammed into the far wall behind him was dead before it struck, nearly headless. He went on to the thick dividing wall between stall and yard.

The lock to the storeroom door was on the inner side of the wall, concealed by the planking but not too difficult to find. Dowland

inserted the key, twisted it into position, felt a slight click, and stepped back as the door began to swing out toward him.

The storeroom contained the general kind of paraphernalia he had expected to find, including three antiradiation suits. It took Dowland twenty minutes to convince himself that the one thing it definitely did not contain in any obvious manner was a key to the laboratory. Appropriate detection instruments might have disclosed it somewhere, but he didn't have them.

The fact was dismaying because it ended his hopes of finding the key. It would take most of the night to make a thorough search of the various ranch buildings, and at best there would be an even chance of discovering the key in the process. Wherever it was, it must be carefully concealed. If Miguel regained consciousness, the information could be forced from him, but it wasn't too likely that the older Trelawney ever would wake up again.

Dowland picked up two of the three AR suits, folded them over his arm, stood, still hesitant, glancing up and down the long, narrow space of the storeroom, half aware that he was hoping now some magical intuition might point out the location of the key to him at the last second. If he could get into the labora-

tory, he was reasonably sure he could puzzle out the mechanisms that directed the shift of YM into radioactivity, and shut them down. A machine was a machine, after all. Then, with the YM interference eliminated, grid power should be available again, and

Dowland glanced at his watch again, shook his head. No point in considering it—he couldn't get into the laboratory. An hour and a half had gone to no purpose. Hunting for the key had looked like a good gamble, the quickest and therefore least dangerous method of solving the whole awesome problem. But it hadn't worked out; and what was left was to work down the side of Lion Mesa, and start hiking out across the desert. With luck, he'd find the communicator start picking up grid power again around dawn—if the YM didn't cut loose with further unpredictable and much more disastrous "phenomena" before then. Unsatisfactorily vague as the available information had been, it implied that what had happened around here was still, so far, on a very mild level. The Trelawneys, in spite of their confidence that the Overgovernment was bluffing, that YM was harmless if properly handled, might have had the good sense to work with only the most minute quantities to begin with.

HE LEFT the storeroom door open, turned off the whitely glowing campfire sticks, and took them, with the AR suits, back to the house with him. The living room had become almost completely dark. Uncle and niece were where he had left them. Dowland worked for a minute or two to release the automatic shutters over the single wide window; they came down into position then with a sudden thud which shook the room but failed to arouse the Trelawneys. Dowland relit one of the sticks and dropped it into the fireplace. The room filled with clear light.

He stacked the other sticks against the wall, laid the AR suits over the back of a chair. He had considered getting the Trelawneys into them as a safety measure against whatever might happen before the matter was over, but had dropped the idea again. It would be questionable protection. The antiradiation field was maintained automatically while a suit was worn, and it impeded breathing just enough to have occasionally suffocated an unconscious wearer. Jill would discover the suits when she woke up and could use her own judgment about them.

Dowland was coming back from the grid-car with his mountaineering harness and portable communicator when the hogs began to scream again. He stopped,

startled. There was an odd and disturbing quality to the racket this time—even more piercing than before—and, unless he was mistaken, the huge animals were in a sudden panic about something. Next, he heard them slamming against the sides of the corral, apparently trying to break out of it. His heart started to pound with instinctive alarms. Should he go down and investigate? Then, before he could decide, he heard through the din of the hogs, swelling gradually to almost match those incredible shrieks in volume, another sound. For a moment, something seemed to shut off Dowland's listening to the rumble and roar of a rushing, turbulent mass of water—and his ears told him it was passing by beneath him.

* * *

IT MIGHT have been almost two minutes later before Dowland began to think clearly again. He had reached the house at a dead run—a senseless flight reaction under the circumstances, not far from complete panic. In the darkness outside, the mesa had seemed to sway and tilt, treacherous footing over the eerie booming of a river which had rolled through a long-dead past. In those seconds Dowland hadn't thought to question Jill Trelawney's story about a machine that brought about shifts

in time. His senses seemed to have as much evidence to support it as anyone could demand.

Back in the house, though the thundering disturbance continued, that conviction rapidly faded. He could close his eyes and immediately have the feeling of being on an unstable bridge above the swirls of some giant current. He could open them again and tell himself that YM-400 had a reputation for freakish effects—and that this specific effect, at any rate, should not be very harmful since Jill had reported it as having occurred on three separate occasions during the preceding day. To speak of such a commotion as being only the sound of a "river flowing under the house" seemed to approach the outrageous in understatement; but Jill Trelawney had turned out to be an unusual young person all around.

She and her uncle hadn't stirred, but Dowland knew that their presence in the room steadied him. He knew, too, that, whatever happened next, he couldn't allow himself to be rattled into blind fright again. The situation was dangerous enough. If he let his nerves stampede him, he would find himself unable to take any effective action.

He went over deliberately to the mountaineering harness he had dropped when he entered the

lighted room, and began to check through the equipment. He intended to carry, in addition, only the communicator, the IPA gun, a canteen of water, and a small flashlight; and he would abandon the harness and its items at the foot of the mesa. There were two hunting rifles in the car, with a vastly better range than the handgun; but a rifle would slow him down and would make very little real difference if he had the bad luck to run into Carter's Troopers in the desert.

Somewhat to his surprise, the underground tumult appeared to be growing fainter before he had concluded his inspection. Dowland paused to listen, and within a few seconds there was no more doubt about it. Jill had said it had gone on for half an hour on each of the previous occasions; but Dowland's watch confirmed that the present disturbance was subsiding rapidly after less than ten minutes. By the time he stood up, snapped on the harness and shrugged it into position, it had become almost inaudible.

Which might be a good sign, or a bad one, or without particular significance of any kind. He couldn't know, and he'd probably be better off if he didn't start thinking too much about it. He turned for a last survey of the room before setting out, and discovered that Miguel Trelawney

had opened his eyes and was looking at him.

DOWLAND stood stockstill for a moment, hardly daring to believe it. Then, quietly, he unbuckled the harness again, and let it down to the floor. The eyes of the big man on the couch seemed to follow the motion, then shifted slowly up toward the ceiling of the room, and closed again.

"Trelawney," Dowland said softly, without moving.

Miguel Trelawney made a deep, sighing sound, turned on his side and lay quiet, his back now to Dowland. A few seconds later, Dowland was looking down at him from the other side of the couch.

It might have been only a momentary thing, a brief advantage medic had gained in its invisible struggle with a process which would still end in death. But he couldn't be sure. The eyes remained closed, the pulse was weak and unsteady. Dowland thought of injecting a stimulant into Trelawney, and discarded the idea immediately. Medic manufactured its own stimulants as required, counteracted any others. Even the effects of the quiz-drug would be reduced by it, but not enough to keep Dowland from getting any answer he wanted—provided Trelawney's mind cleared for

only three or four minutes of lucidity.

There was no way of knowing when such a period of lucidity might develop. But now that the man had appeared to awaken, the possibility that it would happen within the next hour or two became a very definite one.

Dowland stood briefly in scowling indecision. The next hour or two could also see him nearly down the side of the mesa, depending on the difficulties of the descent . . . but there was no real choice. It was a gamble either way again; if Trelawney didn't awaken, the other gamble remained . . . How long, at most, could he afford to delay?

Leaving YM out of the calculation, since it couldn't be calculated, he had only the arrival of the Freeholder Troopers to consider. There was no apparent possibility that any sizable party could appear before daybreak, but there was an even chance they would be there around that time. When they came, he must either be in communication with the Solar Police Authority or far enough away from Lion Mesa to be able to avoid detection. . . .

Four hours should be enough to give him a reasonable safety margin. He had till midnight, or a little later.

Dowland pulled a chair up to the side of the couch and sat down. The night wasn't quiet.

The hogs squalled occasionally, and the wind still seemed to be rising. In spite of his efforts to avoid unsettling lines of thought, the nightmarish quality of the situation on the mesa kept returning to his mind and wasn't easily dismissed. The past—the past of over half a million years ago—had moved close too the present tonight . . . That was the stubborn, illogical feeling—and fear—which he couldn't entirely shake off.

Half an hour later, Miguel Trelawney began breathing uneasily, then stirred about, but lapsed again within seconds into immobile unconsciousness.

Dowland resumed his waiting.

His watch had just told him it was shortly before eleven-thirty when he heard the shots. They were three shots—clear, closely spaced cracks of sound, coming from a considerable distance away. Dowland was out of his chair with the second one, halfway down the dark entry hall as he heard the third. He opened the door at the end of the hall just wide enough to slip through, moved out quickly, and closed the door behind him to keep the glow of light from the living room from showing outside.

As the door snapped shut,

there were three more shots. A hunting rifle. Perhaps two miles to the north. . . .

DOWLAND stood staring up toward the wind-tossed line of the forest above the ranch area. Who was up there on the mesa—and why the shooting? Had the Troopers managed to get some men in by air? What would they be firing at?

Signal shots, he thought then. And a signal to the ranch, in that case . . . Signaling what?

With that, another thought came, so abruptly and convincingly that it sent a chill through him.

Doctor Paul Trelawney. . . .

Paul Trelawney, not in the laboratory building—as Jill had surmised. Gone elsewhere, now returned. And, like his brother, returned to a point other than the one from which he had left.

A man exhausted and not sure of where he was on the big tableland, an injured man—or perhaps one weakened by radiation sickness—such a man would fire a gun in the night to draw attention to himself. To get help.

Minutes later, Dowland was headed in the direction from which the shots had come, carrying one of his own rifles, along with the police gun. It was very unlikely he could get close enough to Trelawney—if it was Trelawney—to be heard ap-

proaching; but once he reached the general area of the shots, he would fire the rifle, and wait for a response. In the forest, the wind was wild and noisy, and the going was as rough as he had suspected it would be. Moonlight flowed into the open rocky stretches occasionally, and faded again as clouds moved on overhead. Among the trees he could barely see his way and had to advance more slowly.

He came presently to a wide, smooth hump of rock shouldering up through the timber, and stopped to check the time. Twenty-five minutes had passed since he left the area of the house. If he had calculated correctly, the shots should have come from approximately this point. He moved somewhat cautiously into the open—a man waiting for help would think of selecting a place where he could be easily seen; and this could be the spot Paul Trelawney had chosen. And Trelawney, armed with a gun, might react rather abruptly if he saw a stranger approach.

But the ridge lay empty under the moon, stretching out for over a hundred yards to right and left. Dowland reached its top, moved on among the trees on the north side, and there paused again.

A feeling came, gradually and uneasily, of something wrong around here. He stood listening,

unable to define exactly what was disturbing him; then a fresh gust of wind whipped through the branches about him, and the wrongness was on the wind—a mingled odor, not an unfamiliar one, but out of place in the evergreen forest, on this rocky shelf. A breath of warm darkness, of rotting, soft vegetation—of swamp or river-bed. Dowland found his breathing quickening.

Then the scent faded from the air again. It might, he was thinking seconds later, have been a personal hallucination, a false message from nerves over-excited by the events of the night. But if Paul Trelawney *had* returned to this point from a distant time, the route by which he had come might still be open. And the opening not far from here. It was a very unpleasant notion. Dowland began to move on again, but in a slow and hesitant manner now.

Another five minutes, he thought. At the end of that time, he certainly must have covered the distance over which the wind had carried the bark of a rifle—and should, in fact, be a little to the north of Trelawney on the mesa. If there were no further developments by then, he would fire a shot himself.

The five minutes took him to another section of open ground, more limited than the

previous one. Again an outcropping of weathered rock had thrust back the trees, and Dowland worked his way up the steep side to the top, and stood looking about. After some seconds, the understanding came suddenly that he was delaying firing the rifle because of a reluctance to reveal his presence in these woods. With an abrupt, angry motion he brought up the barrel, pointing it across the trees to the north, and pulled the trigger.

The familiar whiplash of sound seemed startlingly loud. An instant later, there was a series of unnerving crashing noises in the forest ahead. Apparently some large animal had been alarmed by the shot. He heard it blundering off for a few hundred yards; then there was silence, as if it had stopped to listen. And then there was another sound, a deep, long cry that sent a shiver through his flesh. It ended; and the next thing that caught his attention was a glimpse of something moving near the edge of his vision to the left, just above the forest. His head and eyes shifted quickly toward it, and he found himself staring after a great shadowy thing flapping and gliding away over the tops of the trees. It disappeared almost immediately behind the next rise of ground.

Dowland still stared after it, his mind seeming to move sluggishly as if unwilling to admit what he had seen was no creature he had ever heard about. Then it occurred to him suddenly that Trelawney had not yet responded to the signal shot; and almost with the thought, he grew aware of a renewed disturbance in the forest before him.

This one was much less loud than the other had been. For a moment, Dowland thought it was being caused by the wind. But the noises continued; and in a few more seconds it became obvious that something—something that seemed to be very large indeed—was moving among the trees and approaching the open area. By that time, it wasn't very far away.

Dowland turned, his mouth working silently, and slipped down the south side of the big rock hump, making no more noise than he could help. Already the trees were shaking on the other side of the rock. He ducked, crouched, into a thick mass of juniper branches, pushed through them, and made his way quickly and quietly deeper among the trees. This new thing, whatever it was, must also have heard the shot. It might check when it reached the open area and, when it discovered nothing to arouse its

further curiosity, move off again.

But it didn't. Glancing back through the trees, Dowland had an indistinct glimpse of something very tall coming swiftly around the shoulder of rock. He turned, scuttled on under the branches, and a moment later, there was a tremendous crashing at the point where he had left the open ground. The thing was following him down into the woods.

Dowland turned again, gasping, dropped the rifle, and pulled the IPA gun from his pocket. The thickets splintered; a towering shape came through them. He drove three shots at it, had the approximate sensation of being struck across the head with an iron bar, and felt himself fall forward. He lost consciousness before he hit the earth.

* * *

WHEN he opened his eyes, his first thought was that he should be feeling a king-sized headache. He wasn't. He was lying face down on moist forest mold. There was a very dim pre-dawn light about. So several hours must have gone by since. . . .

Dowland stiffened a moment, then turned his head very slowly, peering about. After a mo-

ment, he pushed himself quietly up on hands and knees. The trees before him shifted uneasily in the wind. Farther on, he could make out part of the hump of rock on which he had stood and fired a shot to draw Trelawney's attention. Between, the ground looked as if a tank had come plowing into the forest. But there was no giant shape lying there.

So his three shots hadn't brought it down. But it had gone away—after doing what to him?

Dowland saw the IPA gun lying beside him, picked it up, and got slowly to his feet. He ran a hand experimentally over his head. No lumps, not even a feeling of tenderness . . . He would have sworn that the crack he'd



felt had opened his skull. He looked about for the rifle, saw it, picked it up, and went over to the area where the trees had been tossed about.

There was a trail there—a very improbable trail. He studied it, puzzled and frowning. Not the tracks of an animal. If it had been more regular, such a track conceivably might have been laid by a machine moving along on a very wide smooth roller. There were no indications of any kind of a tread. As it was, about all he could say now was that something very ponderous had crushed a path—a path varying between approximately eight and fourteen feet in width—through the woods to this point, and had then withdrawn again along a line roughly parallel to its approach . . . And he could say one other thing about it, Dowland added mentally. The same ponderous entity could knock out a man for hours, without apparently injuring him, or leaving any sign of how he had been struck down.

The last sounded more like a machine again; a machine which was armed in some mysterious manner. When his shot had flushed up the big flying creature during the night, he'd almost been convinced that some monster out of Terra's distant past was there on the mesa. Those two things just didn't jibe.

Dowland shook his head. He could think about that when he had more time. He'd lost—he looked at his watch—a little less than four hours. In four hours, a large number of things might have happened in the ranch area, with only the one partly attractive possibility among them that somebody had managed to get into the laboratory and shut off the YM flow.

HE started back at a cautious trot. Downhill and with the light strengthening gradually, covering ground was considerably less of a problem than it had been during the night. The wind hadn't let up; it still came in wild, intermittent gusts that bent the trees. Now and then a cloud of dust whipped past, suggesting that the air over the desert was also violently disturbed. And it might very well be, Dowland thought, that YM could upset atmospheric conditions in an area where it was active. Otherwise, if there was anything abnormal going on in the forest about him, there were no detectable indications of it.

He came out presently on a ridge from where the ranch area was in view. It lay now approximately a third of a mile ahead. In the dim light, everything seemed quiet. Dowland slowed to a walk.

He might be heading into an

ambush down there. Jill Trelawney could, at most, be beginning to wake up from her drugged sleep and for another hour or so she would be too confused and groggy to present a problem. But others might be at the ranch by now; Paul Trelawney or a group of Carter's Troopers. And whether Jill was able to give them a coherent report or not, any of the Freeholder conspirators would discover very quickly that somebody who was not a member of their group had been there before them; they would anticipate his return, be on the watch for it. Dowland left the direct line he had been following, and headed east, moving with constantly increasing caution. On that side, the forest grew closest to the ranch buildings, and he remembered noticing a hedge-like thicket of evergreens just north of the cleared land. He could make a preliminary check of the area from there.

He was within a hundred and fifty feet of the point when he discovered just how healthy the notion of a preliminary check had been. A man was lying in the cover of the evergreens Dowland had been thinking about, head up, studying the ranch grounds. He wore an antiradiation suit of the type Dowland had found in the storeroom; a heavy rifle lay beside him. His

face was in profile. It was smeared now with the sweat and dirt the AR field had held in, but Dowland recognized the bold, bony features instantly.

He had finally found Doctor Paul Trelawney.

* * *

IT took Dowland over eight minutes to cover the remaining distance between them. But the stalk had eminently satisfactory results. He was within a yard of Trelawney before the Freeholder became aware of his presence. The IPA gun prodded the man's spine an instant later.

"No noise, please," Dowland said softly. "I'd sooner not kill you. I might have to."

Paul Trelawney was silent for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was raw with shock. "Who the devil are you?"

"Solar Police Authority," Dowland said. "You know why I'm here."

Trelawney grunted. Dowland went on, "Why are you hiding out?"

"Why do you think?" Trelawney asked irritably. "Before showing myself, I was trying to determine the whereabouts of the man who fired a rifle within half a mile of me during the night."

So they had been stalking each other. Dowland said, "Why

couldn't that person have been your brother or niece?"

"Because I know the sound of our rifles."

"My mistake . . . Do you have a gun or other weapon on you?"

"A knife."

"Let's have it."

Trelawney reached under his chest, brought out a sheathed knife and handed it back to Dowland. Dowland lobbed it into the bushes a few yards away, moved back a little.

"Get up on your hands and knees now," he said, "and we'll make sure that's all."

He was careful about the search. Trelawney appeared passive enough at the moment, but he was not a man too take chances with. The AR suit turned out to be concealing a tailored-in two-way communicator along with as many testing and checking devices as an asteroid miner's outfit, but no weapons. In a sealed pocket, obviously designed for it, was a five-inch atomic key. Dowland slid the heavy disk out with fingers that suddenly were shaking a little.

"Does this open your laboratory here?"

"Yes."

Dowland detached the communicator's transmission unit, and dropped it with the laboratory key into his pocket. "All right," he said, "turn around

and sit down." He waited until Trelawney was facing him, then went on. "How long have you been watching the ranch?"

"About an hour."

"Seen anyone—or anything?"

Trelawney regarded him quizzically, shook his head. "Not a thing."

"I won't waste time with too many questions just now," Dowland said. "The laboratory is locked, and the machine you started in there apparently is still in operation. Your brother was found outside the laboratory yesterday morning, and may be dead or dying of internal radiation burns. He was alive and didn't seem to be doing too badly when I left him and Miss Trelawney in the house last night to go looking for you. I had to drug Miss Trelawney—she isn't a very cooperative person. She should still be asleep.

"Now, if I hadn't showed up here just now, what did you intend to do?"

"I intended to stop the machine, of course," Trelawney said. His expression hadn't changed while Dowland was talking. "Preferably without involving the Solar Police Authority in our activities. But since you've now involved yourself, I urgently suggest that we go to the laboratory immediately and take care of the matter together."

Dowland nodded. "That's what I had in mind, Trelawney. Technically you're under arrest, of course, and you'll do whatever has to be done in there at gun point. Are we likely to run into any difficulties in the operation?"

"We very probably will," Trelawney said thoughtfully, "and it's just as probable that we won't know what they are before we encounter them."

Dowland stood up. "All right," he said, "let's go. We'll stop off at the house on the way. I want to be sure that Miss Trelawney isn't in a position to do something thoughtless."

He emptied the magazine of Trelawney's rifle before giving it to him. They started down to the house, Trelawney in the lead, the IPA gun in Dowland's hand.

The house door was closed. Trelawney glanced back questioningly. Dowland said in a low voice, "It isn't locked. Open it, go on in, and stop two steps inside the hallway. I'll be behind you. They're both in the living room."

He followed Trelawney in, reaching back to draw the door shut again. There was a whisper of sound. Dowland half turned, incredulously felt something hard jab painfully against his backbone. He stood still.

"Drop your gun, Dowland,"

Jill Trelawney said behind him. Her voice was as clear and unslurred as if she had been awake for hours. Dowland cursed himself silently. She must have come around the corner of the house the instant they went in.

"My gun's pointing at your uncle's back," he said. "Don't do anything that might make me nervous, Miss Trelawney."

"Don't try to bluff Jill, friend," Paul Trelawney advised him without turning his head. There was dry amusement in the man's voice. "No one's ever been able to do it. And she's quite capable of concluding that trading an uncle for an SPA spy would still leave Terra ahead at this stage. But that shouldn't be necessary. Jill?"

"Yes, Paul?"

"Give our policeman a moment to collect his wits. This does put him in a very embarrassing position, after all. And I can use his help in the lab."

"I'll give you exactly three seconds, Dowland," Jill said. "And you'd better believe that is *not* a bluff. One . . ."

Dowland dropped his gun.

* * *

THE two Trelawneys held a brief, whispered conversation in the living room. Dowland, across the room from them, and under cover of two guns now,

couldn't catch much of it. Jill was in one of the radiation suits he'd brought in from the storeroom. Miguel was dead. He had still been unconscious when she woke up, and had stopped breathing minutes afterwards. Medic had done what it could; in this case it simply hadn't been enough. Jill, however, had found another use for it. Dowland thought the possibility mightn't have occurred to anyone else in similar circumstances; but he still should have thought of it when he left the house. As she began to struggle up from sleep, she remembered what Dowland had told her about medic, and somehow she had managed to inject a full ampule of it into her arm. It had brought her completely awake within minutes.

The murmured talk ended. The girl looked rather white and frightened now. Paul Trelawney's face was expressionless as he came over to Dowland. Jill shoved the gun she had put on Dowland into her belt, picked up Paul's hunting rifle, held it in her hands, and stood waiting.

"Here's the procedure, Dowland," Trelawney said. "Jill will go over to the lab with us, but stay outside on guard. She'll watch . . ."

"Did you tell her," Dowland interrupted, "to keep an eye out for something that stands twice as high as this house?"

Trelawney looked at him a moment. "So you ran into it," he said. "I was wondering. It's very curious that . . . well, one thing at a time. I cautioned her about it, as it happens. Now come over to the table."

Dowland remained standing beside the table, while across from him Trelawney rapidly sketched out two diagrams on a piece of paper. The IPA gun lay on the table near Trelawney's right hand. There might have been an outside chance of reaching it if one could have discounted Jill's watchfulness. Which, Dowland decided, one couldn't. And he'd seen her reload the rifle she was holding. He stayed where he was.

Trelawney shoved the paper across to him.

"Both diagrams represent our machine," he said. "and they should give you a general idea of what you'll see. This wheel here is at the far side of the console when we come in the door. The wheel is the flow regulator—the thing you have to keep in mind. There are scale markings on it. The major markings have the numbers one to five. Yesterday morning the regulator was set at five—full flow. Spin the wheel back to one, and the Ym-400 that's been producing the flow goes inert. Is that clear?"

Dowland nodded. "Clear enough."

"After that," Trelawney remarked, "we may be able to take things a little easier."

"What's the quantity you're using in there?"

"No real reason I should tell you that, is there? But I will. The sixty-eight kilograms the Overgovernment's been grieving about are under the machine platform. We're using all of it." He grinned briefly, perhaps at Dowland's expression. "The type of job we had in mind required quantities in that class. Now, about yourself. We're not murderers. Jill tells me you can't be bribed—all right. What will happen, when this thing's settled, is that you'll have an attack of amnesia. Several months of your life will be permanently lost from your memory, including, of course, everything connected with this operation. Otherwise you won't be harmed. Understand?"

"I've heard of such things," Dowland said drily.

It wouldn't, however, be done that way. It was the kind of thing told a man already as good as dead, to keep him from making a desperate attempt to save himself. The Freeholders really wouldn't have much choice. Something had loused up their plans here, and if Dowland either disappeared or was found suffering from a sudden bout of amnesia, the IPA would turn its

full attention on Terra at once. If he died, his death could be plausibly arranged to look like an accident or a killing for personal motives. These people were quite capable of sacrificing one of their group to back such a story up. And it would pass. Terra was under no more immediate suspicion than any other world. Dowland had been on a routine assignment.

THERE were a few brief preparations. Paul Trelawney checked the batteries in the radiation suits he and Jill were wearing, then exchanged his set for that of the spare suit. Dowland left his own AR field off for the moment. It was at least as adequate as the one developed by the Trelawneys' suits, and in some respects a much more practical device. But the suit batteries had an effective life of twenty-four hours, expending them automatically while the suits were worn. His field would maintain itself for a minimum of an hour and a half, a maximum of two hours. In this situation, Dowland wasn't sure how long he would have to depend on the field. A few more minutes of assured protection might make a difference.

He saw Trelawney studying the mountaineering rig on the floor; then he picked up the harness and brought it over to him.

"Here, put it on," he said. "What for?" Dowland asked, surprised.

Trelawney grinned. "We may have a use for it. You'll find out in a minute or two."

They left the house by a back entrance. Clouds were banked low on the eastern horizon now; the first sunlight gleamed pale gold beneath them. In the west the sky was brown with swirling dust. Jill stopped twenty yards from the laboratory building and stood on the slope, rifle in hand, watching the men go on. At the door, Dowland switched on his AR field. Trelawney tossed the disk-shaped key over to him.

"Know how to use it?"

Dowland nodded.

"All right. After you've snapped it in and it releases again, throw it back to me. It may be the last one around, and we're not taking it into the laboratory this time. When the door starts moving down, step back to the right of it. We'll see what the lab is like before we go in." Trelawney indicated a thimble-sized instrument on his suit. "This'll tell whether the place is hot at the moment, and approximately how hot." He waved the IPA gun in Dowland's direction. "All right, go ahead."

Dowland fitted the key into the central depression in the door, pressed down, felt the key snap into position with a sharp

twisting motion of its own, released his pressure on it. An instant later, the key popped back out into his hand. He tossed it back to Trelawney, who caught it left-handed and threw it over his head in Jill's direction. The disk thudded heavily into the grass ten feet from her. The girl walked over, picked it up, and slid it into one of her suit pockets.

The slab of metasteel which made up the laboratory door began moving vertically downward. The motion stopped when the door's top rim was still several inches above the level of the sill.

A low droning came from the little instrument on Trelawney's suit. It rose and fell irregularly like the buzz of a circling wasp. Mingled with it was something that might have been the hiss of escaping steam. That was Dowland's detector confirming. The lab reeked with radiation.

He glanced over at Trelawney.

"Hot enough," the Freeholder said. "We'll go inside. But stay near the door for a moment. There's something else I want to find out about. . . ."

INSIDE, the laboratory was unpartitioned and largely empty, a great shell of a building. Only the section to the left of the entrance appeared to have been used. That section was

lighted. The light arose evenly from the surfaces of the raised machine platform halfway over to the opposite wall. The platform was square, perhaps twenty feet along its sides. Dowland recognized the apparatus on it from Trelawney's diagrams. The central piece was an egg-shaped casing which appeared to be metasteel. Near its blunt end, partly concealed, stood the long, narrow instrument console. Behind the other end of the casing, an extension ramp jutted out above the platform. At the end of the ramp was a six-foot disk that might have been quartz, rimless, brightly iridescent. It was titled to the left, facing the bank of instruments.

"A rather expensive bit of equipment over there, Dowland," Trelawney said. "My brother developed the concept, very nearly in complete detail, almost twenty-five years ago. But a great deal of time and thought and work came then before the concept turned into the operating reality on that platform."

He nodded to the left. "That's Miguel's coat on the floor. I wasn't sure it would still be here. The atomic key you were searching for so industriously last night is in one of its pockets. Miguel was standing just there, with the coat folded over his arm, when I saw him last—perhaps two or three seconds before

I was surprised to discover I was no longer looking at the instrument controls in our laboratory."

"Where were you?" Dowland asked. "Six hundred thousand years in the past?"

"The instruments showed a fix on that point in time," Trelawney said. "But this was, you understand, a preliminary operation. We intended to make a number of observations. We had not planned a personal transfer for several more weeks. But in case the test turned out to be successful beyond our expectations, I was equipped to make the transfer. That bit of optimistic foresight is why I'm still alive."

What was the man waiting for? Dowland asked, "What actually happened?"

"A good question, I'd like to know the whole answer myself. What happened in part was that I suddenly found myself in the air, falling toward a river. It was night and cloudy, but there was light enough to show it was a thoroughly inhospitable river . . . And now I believe"—his voice slowed thoughtfully—"I believe I understand why my brother was found outside the closed door of this building. Over there, Dowland. What does that look like to you?"

Near the far left of the building, beyond the immediate range

of the light that streamed from the machine stand, a big packing crate appeared to have been violently—and rather oddly—torn apart. The larger section of the crate lay near the wall, the smaller one approximately twenty feet closer to the machine platform. Assorted items with which it had been packed had spilled out from either section. But the floor between the two points of wreckage was bare and unlit-tered. Except for that, one might have thought the crate had exploded.

IT wasn't an explosion," Trelawney agreed when Dowland said as much. He was silent a moment, went on, "In this immediate area, two space-time frames have become very nearly superimposed. There is a constant play of stresses now as the two frames attempt to adjust their dissimilarities. Surrounding our machine we have a spherical concentration of those stresses, and there are moments when space here is literally wrenched apart. If one were caught at such an instant—ah!"

To Dowland it seemed that a crack of bright color had showed briefly in the floor of the building, between the door and the machine platform. It flickered, vanished, reappeared at another angle before his ears had

fully registered the fact that it was accompanied by a curiously chopped-off roar of sound. Like a play of lightning. But this was. . . .

The air opened out before him, raggedly framing a bright-lit three-dimensional picture. He was staring down across a foaming river to the rim of a towering green and yellow forest. The crash of the river filled the building. Something bulky and black at the far left . . . but the scene was gone—

The interior of the laboratory building lay quiet and unchanged before them again. Dowland said hoarsely, "How did you know what was going to happen?"

"I was in a position to spend several hours observing it," Trelawney said, "from the other side. You see now, I think, that we can put your mountaineer's kit to some very practical use here."

Dowland glanced across the building. "The walls . . .",

"Metasteel," Trelawney said, "and thank God for that. The building's sound; the stresses haven't affected it. We'll have some anchor points. A clamp piton against that wall, six feet above the console walk and in line with it, another one against the doorframe here, and we can rope across."

Dowland saw it, unsnapped

his harness, fed the end of the magnerope through the eye of a piton, and twisted it tight. "Are we going together?" he asked.

Trelawney shook his head. "You're going, Dowland. Sorry about that, but this is no time for sporting gestures. The rope doesn't eliminate the danger. But if you find your feet suddenly dangling over the air of a very old time, you'll still stay here—I hope. If you don't make it across, I'll follow. We get two chances to shut Ymir down instead of one. All right?"

"Since you have the gun, yes," Dowland said. "If I had it, it would be the other way around."

"Of course," Trelawney agreed. He watched in silence then as Dowland rammed the threaded piton down the muzzle of the gun, locked it in position, took aim across the machine platform, and fired. The piton clamp made a slapping sound against the far wall, froze against it. Dowland gave the loose end of the rope a few tugs, said, "Solid," cut the rope, and handed the end to Trelawney.

The Freeholder reached up to set a second piton against the doorframe, fed a loop of the rope through it, and twisted it tight. Dowland slipped a set of grappling gloves out of the harness, pulled one over his right hand, tossed the other to Trelawney. "In case," he said, "you have to

follow. Magnerope gets to be wearing on bare hands."

Trelawney looked briefly surprised, then grinned. "Thanks," he said. "Can you do it with one glove?"

"No strain at that distance."

"Too bad you're not a Terran, Dowland. We could have used you."

"I'm satisfied," Dowland said. "Any point in waiting now for another run of those cracks in space before making the trip?"

Trelawney shook his head. "None at all, I'm afraid. From what I saw, there's no more regularity in those stress patterns than there is in a riptide. You see how the rope is jerking right now—you'll get pulled around pretty savagely, I'd say, even if you don't run into open splits on the way across."

* * *

DOWLAND was fifteen feet from the door, half running with both hands on the rope, when something plucked at him. He strained awkwardly sideways, feet almost lifting from the floor. Abruptly he was released, went stumbling forward a few steps before the next invisible current tugged at him, pulling him downward now. It was a very much stronger pull, and for endless seconds it continued to build up. His shoulders

seemed ready to snap before he suddenly came free again.

The rest of the way to the platform remained almost undisturbed, but Dowland was trembling with tensions before he reached it; he could feel the drag of the AR field on his breathing. The steps to the platform were a dozen feet to his right—too far from the rope. Dowland put his weight on the rope, swung forward and up, let the rope go and came down on the narrow walk between instrument board and machine section. The panels shone with their own light; at the far end he saw the flow-control wheel Trelawney had indicated, a red pointer opposite the numeral "5." Dowland took two steps toward it, grasped the wheel, and spun it down.

The pointer stopped at "1." He heard it click into position there.

Instantly, something slammed him sideways against the console, sent him staggering along it, and over the low railing at the end of the platform. The floor seemed to be shuddering as he struck it, and then to tilt slowly. Dowland rolled over, came up on hands and knees, facing back toward the platform. Daylight blazed again in the building behind him, and the roar of a river that rolled through another time filled his ears. He got to his feet, plunged back toward the whip-

ping rope above the platform. The light and the roaring cut off as he grasped the rope, flashed back into the building, cut off again. Somewhere somebody had screamed. . . .

Dowland swung about on the rope, went hanging himself along it, back toward the door. His feet flopped about over the floor, unable to get a stand there for more than an instant. It was a struggle now to get enough air through the antiradiation field into his lungs. He saw dust whip past the open door, momentarily obscuring it. The building bucked with earthquake fury. And where was Trelawney?

He saw the red, wet thing then, lying by the wall just inside the door; and sickness seized him because Trelawney's body was stretched out too far to make it seem possible it had ever been that of a man. Dust blasted in through the door as he reached it, and subsided, leaving a choking residue trapped within the radiation screen. If he could only cut off the field. . . .

HIS gun lay too close to the sodden mess along the wall. Dowland picked it up, was bending to snatch the climbing harness from the floor when light flared behind him again. Automatically, he looked back.

Once more the interior of the

building seemed to have split apart. Wider now. He saw the rushing white current below. To the right, above the forest on the bank, the sun was a swollen red ball glaring through layers of mist. And to the left, moving slowly over the river in the blaze of long-dead daylight, was something both unmistakable and not to be believed. But, staring at it in the instant before the scene shivered and vanished again, Dowland suddenly thought he knew what had happened here.

What he had seen was a spaceship.

He turned, went stumbling hurriedly out the door into the whistling wind, saw Jill Trelawney standing there, white-faced, eyes huge, hands to her mouth.

He caught her shoulder. "Come on! We've got to get away from here."

She gasped, "It—*tore* him apart!"

"We can't help him. . . ." Dust clouds were spinning over the back of the mesa, concealing the upper slopes. Dowland glanced to the west, winced at the towering mountain of darkness sweeping toward them through the sky. He plunged up the slope, hauling her along behind him. Jill cried out incoherently once, in a choking voice, but he didn't stop to hear what she was trying to say. He shoved

her into the house, slammed the door shut behind them, hurried her on down the hall and into the living room. As they came in, he switched off his AR field and felt air fill his lungs easily again. It was like surfacing out of deep water. The detector still hissed its thin warning, but it was almost inaudible. They would have to risk radiation now.

"Out of your suit, quick! Whatever's happening in the lab has whistled up a dust storm here. When it hits, that radiation field will strangle you in a minute outdoors."

She stared at him dumbly.

"Get out of your suit!" Dowland shouted, his nerves snapping. "We're going down the eastern wall. It's our only chance. But we can't get down alive if we can't breathe. . . ." Then, as she began unbuckling the suit hurriedly with shaking fingers, he turned to the pile of camping equipment beside the fireplace and pawed through it.

He found the communicator and was snapping it to the mountaineering harness when the front door slammed. He wheeled about, startled. Jill's radiation suit lay on the floor near the entry hall. She was gone.

He was tearing the door open three seconds later, shouted, and saw her through the dust forty feet away, running up toward the forest.

He mightn't have caught her if she hadn't stumbled and gone headlong. Dowland was on top of her before she could get up. She fought him in savage silence like an animal, tearing and biting, her eyes bloodshot slits. There was a mechanical fury about it that appalled him. But at last he got his right arm free, and brought his fist up solidly to the side of her jaw. Jill's head flew back, and her eyes closed.

HE came padding up to the eastern side of the mesa with her minutes later. Here, beyond the ranch area, the ground was bare rock, with occasional clusters of stunted bushes. The dust had become blinding, though the main storm was still miles away. There was no time to stop off at the house to look for the quiz-gun, though it would have been better to try the descent with a dazed and half-paralyzed young woman than with the twisting lunatic Jill might turn into again when she recovered from his punch. At least, he'd have her tied up. Underfoot were grinding and grumbling noises now, the ground shaking constantly. At moments he had the feeling of plodding through something yielding, like quicksand. Only the feeling, he told himself; the rock was solid enough. But . . .

Abruptly, he was at the mesa's

edge. Dowland slid the girl to the ground, straightened up, panting, to dab at his smarting eyes. The mesa behind them had almost vanished in swirling dust.

And through the dust Dowland saw something coming over the open ground he had just traversed.

He stared at it, mouth open, stunned with a sense of unfairness. The gigantic shape was still only partly visible, but it was obvious that it was following them. It approached swiftly over the shaking ground. Dowland took out his gun, with the oddly calm conviction that it would be entirely useless against their pursuer. But he brought it up slowly and leveled it, squinting with streaming eyes through the dust.

And then it happened. The pursuer appeared to falter. It moved again in some manner; something thundered into the ground beside Dowland. Then, writhing and twisting—slowly at first, then faster—the dust-veiled shape seemed to be sinking downward through the rock surface of the mesa.

In another instant, it was gone.

Seconds passed before Dowland gradually lowered the gun again. Dazedly, he grew aware of something else that was different now. A miniature human voice appeared to be jabbering

irritably at him from some point not far away. His eyes dropped to the little communicator attached to his harness.

The voice came from there.

Terra's grid power had returned to Lion Mesa.

* * *

A WEEK later, Lieutenant Frank Dowland was shown into the office of the chief of the Solar Police Authority. The chief introduced him to the two other men there, who were left unidentified, and told him to be seated.

"Lieutenant," he said, "these gentlemen have a few questions to ask you. You can speak as openly to them as you would to me."

Dowland nodded. He had recognized one of the gentlemen immediately—Howard Camhorn, the Coordinator of Research. Reputedly one of the sharpest minds in the Overgovernment's top echelons. The other one was unfamiliar. He was a few years younger than Camhorn, around six inches shorter, chunky, with black hair, brown eyes, an expression of owlish reflectiveness. Probably, Dowland thought, wearing contact lenses. "Yes, sir," he said to the chief, and looked back at the visitors.

"We've seen your report on your recent visit to Terra, Lieu-

tenant Dowland," Camhorn began pleasantly. "An excellent report, incidentally—factual, detailed. What we should like to hear now are the things that you, quite properly, omitted from it. That is, your personal impressions and conclusions."

"For example," the other man took up, as Dowland hesitated, "Miss Trelawney has informed us her uncles were attempting to employ the Ym-400 they had acquired to carry out a time-shift to an earlier Earth period—to the period known as the Pleistocene, to be somewhat more exact. From what you saw, would you say they had succeeded in doing it?"

"I don't know, sir," Dowland said. "I've been shown pictures representing that period during the past few days. The scene I described in the report probably might have existed at that time." He smiled briefly. "However, I have the impression that the very large flying creature I reported encountering that night is regarded as being . . . well, er . . . ah. . ."

"A product of excited nerves?" the short man said, nodding. "Under such extraordinary circumstances, that would be quite possible, you know."

"Yes, sir, I know."

The short man smiled. "But you don't think it was that?"

"No, sir," Dowland said. "I think that I have described exactly what I did hear and see."

"And you feel the Trelawneys established contact with some previous Earth period—not necessarily the Pleistocene?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you report having seen a spaceship in that prehistorical period. . . ."

Dowland shook his head. "No, sir. At the moment I was observing it, I thought it was that. What I reported was having seen something that looked like a spaceship."

"What do you think it was?"

"A timeship—if there is such a word."

"There is such a word," Camhorn interrupted lazily. "I'm curious to hear, lieutenant, what brought you to that conclusion."

"It's a guess, sir. But the thing has to fit together somehow. A timeship would make it fit."

"In what way?"

"I've been informed," Dowland said, "that the Overgovernment's scientists have been unable to make a practical use of YM because something has invariably gone wrong when they did try to use it. I also heard that there was no way of knowing in advance what would happen to make an experiment fail. But something always would happen, and frequently a num-

ber of people would get killed."

Camhorn nodded. "That is quite true."

"Well, then," Dowland said, "I think there is a race of beings who aren't quite in our time and space. They have YM and use it, and don't want anyone else to use it. They can tell when it's activated here, and use their own YM to interfere with it. Then another experiment suddenly turns into a failure."

BUT they don't know yet who's using it. When the Trelawneys turned on their machine, these beings spotted the YM stress pattern back there in time. They went to that point and reinforced the time-blending effect with their own YM. The Trelawneys hadn't intended a complete contact with that first test. The aliens almost succeeded in blending the two periods completely in the area near the laboratory."

"For what purpose?" Camhorn asked.

"I think they're very anxious to get us located."

"With unfriendly intentions?"

"The ones we ran into didn't behave in a friendly manner. May I ask a question, sir?"

"Of course," Camhorn said.

"When the Trelawneys' machine was examined, was the supply of YM adequately shielded?"

"Quite adequately," Camhorn said.

"But when I opened the door, the laboratory was hot. And Miguel Trelawney died of radiation burns. . . ."

Camhorn nodded. "Those are facts that give your theory some substance, lieutenant. No question about it. And there is the additional fact that after you shut off the YM flow in the laboratory, nearly ten minutes passed before the apparent contact between two time periods was broken. Your report indicates that the phenomena you described actually became more pronounced immediately after the shutoff."

"Yes, sir."

"As if the aliens might have been making every effort to retain contact with our time?"

"Yes, sir," Dowland said. "That was my impression."

"It's quite plausible. Now, the indications are that Paul Trelawney actually spent considerable time—perhaps twelve to fourteen hours, at any rate—in that other period. He gave no hint of what he experienced during those hours?"

"No, sir, except to say that it was night when he appeared there. He may have told Miss Trelawney more."

"Apparently, he didn't," Camhorn said. "Before you and he went into the laboratory, he

warned her to watch for the approach of a creature which answers the description of the gigantic things you encountered twice. But that was all. Now, here again you've given us your objective observations. What can you add to them—on a perhaps more speculative basis?"

"Well, sir," Dowland said, "my opinions on that are, as a matter of fact, highly speculative. But I think that Paul Trelawney was captured by the aliens as soon as he appeared in the other time period, and was able to escape from them a number of hours later. Two of the aliens who were attempting to recapture him eventually followed him out on Lion Mesa through another opening the YM stresses had produced between the time periods, not too far away from the first."

Camhorn's stout companion said thoughtfully, "You believe the birdlike creature you saw arrived by the same route?"

"Yes, sir," Dowland said, turning to him. "I think that was simply an accident. It may have been some kind of wild animal that blundered into the contact area and found itself here without knowing what had occurred."

"And you feel," the other man went on, "that you yourself were passing near that contact point in the night at the time you

seemed to be smelling a swamp?"

Dowland nodded. "Yes, sir, I do. Those smells might have been an illusion, but they seemed to be very distinct. And, of course, there are no swamps on the mesa itself."

CAMHORN said, "We'll assume it was no illusion. It seems to fit into the general picture. But, lieutenant, on what are you basing your opinion that Paul Trelawney was a captive of these beings for some time?"

"There were several things, sir," Dowland said. "One of them is that when Miss Trelawney regained consciousness in the hospital she didn't remember having made an attempt to get away from me."

Camhorn nodded. "That was reported."

"She made the attempt," Dowland went on, "immediately after she had taken off her radiation suit to avoid being choked in the dust storm on the way down from the mesa. That is one point."

"Go ahead," Camhorn said.

"Another is that when I discovered Paul Trelawney early in the morning, he was wearing his radiation suit. Judging by his appearance, he had been in it for hours—and a radiation suit, of course, is a very inconvenient thing to be in when you're hiking around in rough country."

"He might," the stout man suggested, "have been afraid of running into a radioactive area."

Dowland shook his head. "No, sir. He had an instrument which would have warned him if he was approaching one. It would have made much more sense to carry the suit, and slip into it again if it became necessary. I didn't give the matter much thought at the time. But then the third thing happened. I did not put that in the report because it was a completely subjective impression. I couldn't prove now that it actually occurred."

Camhorn leaned forward. "Go ahead."

"It was just before the time periods separated and the creature that was approaching Miss Trelawney and myself seemed to drop through the top of the mesa—I suppose it fell back into the other period. I've described it. It was like a fifty-foot gray slug moving along on its tail . . . and there were those two rows of something like short arms. It wasn't at all an attractive creature. I was frightened to death. But I was holding a gun—the same gun with which I had stopped another of those things when it chased me during the night. And the trouble was that this time I wasn't going to shoot."

"You weren't going to shoot?" Camhorn repeated.

"No, sir. I had every reason to try to blow it to pieces as soon as I saw it. The other one didn't follow up its attack on me, so it probably was pretty badly injured. But while I knew that, I was also simply convinced that it would be useless to pull the trigger. That's as well as I can explain what happened. . . .

"I think these aliens can control the minds of other beings, but can't control them through the interference set up by something like our AR fields. Paul Trelawney appeared in the other time period almost in their laps. He had a rifle strapped over his back, but presumably they caught him before he had a chance to use it. They would have examined him and the equipment he was carrying, and when they took off his radiation suit, they would have discovered he belonged to a race which they could control mentally. After that, there would have been no reason for them to guard him too closely. He was helpless.

I THINK Trelawney realized this, and used a moment when his actions were not being controlled to slip back into the suit. Then he was free to act again. When they discovered he had escaped, some of them were detailed to search for him, and two

of those pursuers came out here in our time on the mesa.

"As for Miss Trelawney—well, obviously she wasn't trying to get away from me. Apparently, she wasn't even aware of what she was doing. She was simply obeying physically the orders her mind began to receive as soon as she stepped out of the radiation suit. They would have been to come to the thing, wherever it was at the moment—somewhere up to the north of the ranch area, judging from the direction in which she headed."

There was silence for some seconds. Then Camhorn's companion observed, "There's one thing that doesn't quite fit in with your theory, lieutenant."

"What's that, sir?"

"Your report states that you switched off your AR field at the same time you advised Miss Trelawney to get out of her suit. You should have been equally subject to the alien's mental instructions."

"Well," Dowland said, "I can attempt to explain that, sir, though again there is no way to prove what I think. But it might be that these creatures can control, only one mind at a time. The alien may not have realized that I had . . . well . . . knocked Miss Trelawney unconscious and that she was unable to obey its orders, until it came to the spot and saw us. My assumption is

that it wasn't till that moment that it switched its mental attack to me."

* * *

THE stout man—his name was Laillard White, and he was one of Research's ace trouble-shooters in areas more or less loosely related to psychology—appeared morosely reflective as he and Camhorn left Solar Police Authority Headquarters, and turned toward the adjoining Overgovernment Bureau.

"I gather from your expression," Camhorn remarked, "that our lieutenant was telling the truth."

White grunted. "Of course, he was—as he saw it."

"And he's sane?"

"Quite sane," White agreed absently.

Camhorn grinned. "Then what's the matter, Lolly? Don't you like the idea of time-travel?"

"Naturally not. It's an absurdity."

"You're blunt, Lolly. And rash. A number of great minds differ with you about that."

Laillard White said something rude about great minds in general. He went on, "Was the machine these Trelawneys built found intact?"

Camhorn nodded. "In perfect condition. I found an opportunity to look it over when it and

the others the Freeholders had concealed on Terra were brought in."

"And these machines are designed to make it possible to move through time?"

"No question about that. They function in Riemann space, and are very soundly constructed. A most creditable piece of work, in fact. It's only regrettable that the Trelawney brothers were wasted on it. We might have put their talents to better use. Though as it turned out . . ." He shrugged.

White glanced over at him. "What are you talking about?" he asked suspiciously.

"They didn't accomplish time-travel," Camhorn said, "though in theory they should have. I know it because we have several machines based on the same principles. The earliest was built almost eighty years ago. Two are now designed to utilize the YM thrust. The Trelawney machine is considerably more advanced in a number of details than its Overgovernment counterparts, but it still doesn't make it possible to move in time."

"Why not?"

"I'd like to know," Camhorn said. "The appearance of it is that the reality we live in takes the same dim view of time-travel that you do. Time-travel remains a theoretical possibility. But in practice—when, for example, the

YM thrust is applied for that purpose—the thrust is diverted.”

White looked bewildered. “But if Paul Trelawney didn’t move through time, what *did* he do?”

“What’s left?” Camhorn asked. “He moved through space, of course.”

“Where?”

Camhorn shrugged. “They penetrated Riemann space,” he said, “after harnessing their machine to roughly nineteen thousand times the power that was available to us before the Ymir series of elements dropped into our hands. In theory, Lolly, they might have gone anywhere in the universe. If we’d had the unreasonable nerve to play around with multikilograms of YM—knowing what happened when fractional quantities of a gram were employed—we might have had a very similar experience.”

“I’m still just a little in the dark, you know,” Laillard White observed drily, “as to what the experience consisted of.”

“Oh, Lieutenant Dowland’s theory wasn’t at all far off in that respect. It’s an ironic fact that we have much to thank the Trelawneys for. There’s almost no question at all now what the race of beings they encountered were responsible for the troubles that have plagued us in the use of YM. They’re not the best of

neighbors—neighbors in Riemann space terms, that is. If they’d known where to look for us, things might have become rather hot. They had a chance to win the first round when the Trelawneys lit that sixty-eight kilogram beacon for them. But they made a few mistakes, and lost us again. It’s a draw so far. Except that we now know about as much about them as they’ve ever learned about us. I expect we’ll take the second round handily a few years from now.”

WHITE still looked doubtful. Was it one of their planets the Trelawneys contacted?”

“Oh, no. At least, it would have been an extremely improbable coincidence. No, the machine was searching for Terra as Terra is known to have been in the latter part of the Pleistocene period. The Trelawneys had provided something like a thousand very specific factors to direct and confine that search. Time is impenetrable, so the machine had to find that particular pattern of factors in space, and did. The aliens—again as Lieutenant Dowland theorized—then moved through Riemann space to the planet where the YM thrust was manifesting itself so violently. But once there, they still had no way of determining where in the universe the thrust had originated—even though

they were, in one sense, within shouting distance of Terra, and two of them were actually on its surface for a time. It must have been an extremely frustrating experience all around for our friends."

Laillard White said, "Hm-m," and frowned.

Camhorn laughed. "Let it go, Lolly," he said. "That isn't your field, after all. Let's turn to what is. What do you make of the fact that Dowland appears to have been temporarily immune to the mental commands these creatures can put out?"

"Eh?" White said. His expression turned to one of surprise. "But that's obvious!"

"Glad to hear it," Camhorn said drily.

"Well, it is. Dowland's attitude showed clearly that he suspected the truth himself on that point. Naturally, he was somewhat reluctant to put it into words."

"Naturally. So what did he suspect?"

White shook his head. "It's so simple. The first specimen of humanity the aliens encountered alive was Paul Trelawney. High genius level, man! It would take that level to nullify our I.Q. tests in the manner he and his half-brother did. When those creatures were prowling around on the mesa, they were looking for that kind of mentality. Dow-

land's above average, far from stupid. As you say, you like his theories. But he's no Trelawney. Unquestionably, the aliens in each case regarded him as some kind of clever domestic animal. The only reason he's alive is that they weren't taking him seriously."

THAT," Camhorn said thoughtfully, "may have changed a number of things."

"It may, indeed."

"Do we have anything on hand that would block their specific psi abilities?"

"Oh, surely. If an AR field can stop them, there's nothing to worry about in that respect. Our human telepaths wouldn't be seriously hampered by that degree of interference."

"Very good," Camhorn said. "Do you have any theory about the partial sensory interpretation of the two areas which both Dowland and Miss Trelawney reported? The matter of being able to hear the river on the other planet from time to time."

White nodded. "There are several possible explanations for that. For one thing . . ."

"Better save it for lunch, Lolly," Camhorn interrupted, glancing at his watch. "I see I have two minutes left to make the meeting. Anything else you feel should be brought up at the moment?"

"Just one thing," White said. "If the Trelawneys' machine is capable of locating a Terra-type planet anywhere in the universe . . ."

Camhorn nodded. "It is."

"Then," White said, "we've solved our exploding population problem, haven't we?"

"For the time being, we have," Camhorn agreed. "As a matter of fact, Lolly, that's precisely what the meeting I'm headed for is about."

"Then the Terran Freeholders can stop worrying about the po-

litical pressures that have threatened to turn Terra into another hygienically overcrowded slum-world."

"True enough," Camhorn said. "In another few years, if things go right, every man, woman and child can become a Freeholder—somewhere."

"So the Trelawneys got what they wanted, after all. . . ."

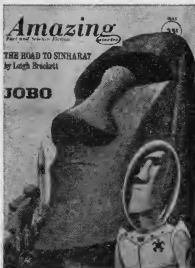
"They did, in a way. If the brothers knew the whole score, I think they'd be satisfied. The situation has been explained to their niece. She is." **THE END**

COMING NEXT MONTH

The sense of wonder, in fiction and fact, pervades the May **AMAZING**. Leigh Brackett returns after too long an absence with a rousing yarn, *The Road to Sinharat*. And prize-winning writer Henry Slesar has written *Joba*, a sensitive novelet, especially for our striking cover.

In our fact feature, Ben Bova concludes his series exploring the possibilities of extra-terrestrial intelligence, with an article examining the evolution of the Life Force on a cosmic scale.

And as a special bonus we will have a fascinating look into the mind of the Soviet science fiction fan in an exclusive article translated from the Russian.



Remember to watch for the May **AMAZING** at newsstands April 11. More important than ever, it will be in its same old familiar, handy pocket size.

*Imagine a Siren, A Circe, a Lorelei . . . lovely and
lonely on a worldlet in space . . . and then a ship
comes . . . with a handsome crew and a Captain . . .
The prospects are for dalliance. But even . . .*

Circe Has Her Problems

By ROGER ZELAZNY

THE fact that this place could not possibly exist should be the tipoff. It should be a craggy, barren hunk of rock, drifting through sunless space without a redeeming feature on its wrinkled vizard. Instead, it is a delicious island in the void, with a breathable atmosphere (breathable by anyone I want to breathe it!), fresh fruits, glittering fountains, an amazing variety of animal life, and me—which would have made men suspect the big bit in the old days. But no, when men get to the point where they start hopping between stars, their minds are always too well-conditioned to the superstition of scientific causality . . .

I am a very lovely broad (I believe that is the current term), and I am as enticing as all hell (literally)—but I digress (I will

get back to me in a moment): my island is about fifty miles in diameter, if you can use that term for non-spherical objects (I am not strong on science), and it's sort of rectangular—even though you can walk on any of its surfaces (or inside it, for that matter); its skies twinkle a perpetual twilight, which is very romantic—and it abounds in chattering, hissing, singing, croaking, growling, and muttering beasts.

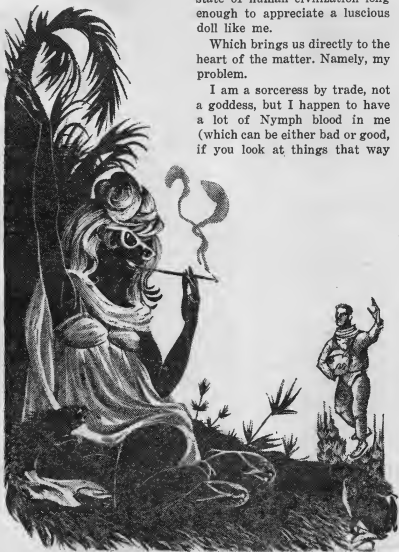
Which brings us nearer the heart of the matter, namely me.

Having been spawned in a far more libertine culture than the present cold, puritanical state of human civilization, I recently cut out for blacker pastures and set up shop here—where I stand out like a dwarf star on radar screens—which always makes for primate curiosity and an eventual

landing, which always makes for men who have been away from the present cold, puritanical state of human civilization long enough to appreciate a luscious doll like me.

Which brings us directly to the heart of the matter. Namely, my problem.

I am a sorceress by trade, not a goddess, but I happen to have a lot of Nymph blood in me (which can be either bad or good, if you look at things that way



very often—I don't). Anyhow, I had enjoyed my obvious attributes for a long while, until a cat-souled she-dog from the isle of Lesbos, in a fit of perverse jealousy (or jealous perversity—slice it either way), laid this curse bit on me, which was very bad indeed (I *do* look at things that way in *this* matter!).

Like I dig men: big men, little men, fat, thin, coarse, refined, brilliant, and et cetera men—the whole lovin' race of 'em! But my present unfortunate condition affects approximately ninety-nine percent of them.

Like, when I kiss them, they have a tendency to assume other forms—chattering, hissing, singing, croaking, growling, muttering forms—all of them quite unsatisfactory—which explains my woes, as well as the background noises.

NOW then, once in a lopsided crescent moon, the right guy comes along—some lug with a genetic resistance to Sappho's abracadabra pocus—and I am always extremely nice to him. Unfortunately, men like that are far between, and they have a tendency to wear out quite soon. Hence, I have been extremely troubled for the past several centuries.

This latest crew is one such heartbreaking instance. None of the clean-shaven, broad-should-

dered, Space Academy products could bear more than a mild peck on the cheek before howling away on all fours with their tails between their legs. Change them back? Sure, I can do that—but whyfor? Like, there is no percentage in kissing animals human if, as soon as you kiss them a second time, they become animals again. So I let them practice Darwin there in the trees while I look enticing and sigh for Mister Right.

(I kissed a navigator an hour ago—he's the one peeling the banana with his feet . . .)

"Pardon me, Miss."

Like wow!

"I am Captain Denton and I am looking for my crew," he smiles. "I hope you understand English."

"Like hope no more, Daddy," say I. "Loud and clear."

"Beg pardon?"

"I understand you, you living Hermes by Praxiteles with a crewcut, you."

"Do you live here?"

"Indeed, and well." I move nearer and breathe upon him.

"Have you seen my men anywhere about? When I found that the atmosphere was breathable I permitted them to leave the ship, for recreational purposes. That was three days ago—"

"Oh, they're around." I toy with the gold medallions on his blue jacket. "What did you get

all these lovely medals for?"

"Oh, this one is the Star of Valor, this is the Cross of Venus, that is the Lunar Crescent, and this is an Exemplary Conduct Medallion," he recounts.

"Tsk, tsk," I touch the latter. "Do you always behave in an exemplary manner?"

"I try, Miss."

I throw my arms about his neck.

"I'm so happy to see an Earthman, after all these years!"

"Really, Miss, I—"

I kiss him a good solid one on the mouth. Why beat about the bush, torturing myself? I might as well find out right away.

And nothing happens! Not a bit of fur! Nary horn nor tail!

And nothing else, either, for that matter . . .

He unclasps my arms gently, but with a firm grip of immense strength. He is so—so masterful. Like one of the Argive chieftains, or the Myrmidon warriors . . .

"I appreciate your enthusiasm at meeting another person if, as you say, you have been alone upon this worldlet very long. I assure you that I shall give you passage to a civilized planet, as soon as I can locate my crew."

"Pooh!" say I. "I don't want your civilized planets. I'm happy here. But you, Big Man, you have unsuspected talents—and great potential! Like, we shall play a wild harpsichord together!"

"'Duty Before All,' Miss, is the motto of the Corps. I must locate my crew before I indulge in any musical pasttimes."

LIKE, I don't dig geometry, but I know a square when I see one. Still, Science is only one of the paths man need follow . . .

"Step into my parlor," say I whistling for the palace, which comes running and settles out of sight on the other side of the hill. "I shall refresh you and give you assistance in your search."

"This is very kind of you," he replies (Grandmother Circe! those shoulders!). "I shall accept your invitation. Is it far?"

"We're almost there already, Captain." I take his arm.

I feed him a roast pig, which had seen happier days, and I proceed to douse his wine with every aphrodisiac I have in stock. I sit back and wait, looking alluring.

Nothing happens.

"Don't you feel a little—uncomfortable?" I finally ask, raising the temperature ten degrees. "Perhaps you'd like to take off your jacket."

"Yes, I believe I shall. It is a trifle warm in here."

"Take off anything you like," I suggest, whistling up a swimming pool. "Perhaps you would like to bathe?"

"I did not notice that pool before. This wine must be making me drowsy."

I whistle for the perfumed bed, and it rolls in with a musical accompaniment.

"Well, a nice bath and a good bed will make you feel like a new man."

"I really should be looking for my crew," he protests, weakly.

"Nonsense, nothing in this world could hurt a fly." I dampen out the background howls and snarls to prove my point. "They will be all right for a few more hours, and you could use the rest."

"True," he finally acknowledges. "They are probably bivouacked beside some gentle waterfall, or engaged in a boyish game of touch football. I shall bathe."

And he undresses and I whistle, which, unfortunately, causes the icebox to move into the room and stop at the edge of the pool.

"Amazingly sophisticated servomechanisms you have," he observes, splashing back to the edge and proceeding to raid the icebox.

* * *

An hour later he is still eating! He is one of those big, hearty types with his mind in his stomach—but still, what a magnificent animal! Great bulging muscles, skin smooth and perfect as marble, deeply tanned, a warrior's dark eyes . . .

I find I am getting a first-class crush on this jerk!

Finally, he finishes eating and

steps from the pool, like Neptune rising from the Aegean—a dripping god of youth and power. I know that he must be thinking by now what I have been thinking all along. It is a simple matter of physiology, according to Science—also, them green flies from Spain are pretty effective.

He towers above me, and I look coy, timid, and, at the same time, inviting.

"It is still bothering me," he observes. "I had better go look for my crew before I take my rest."

THAT does it! Suddenly I see red, also the rest of the rainbow. I snap my fingers and everything vanishes but the bed, into which we are immediately projected.

"Wha-what happened?" he asks.

"Captain Denton," say I, "you have in every way flaunted my obvious charms, and insulted my person by failing to recognize it. I am extremely lovely, and sadly, miserably," I whisper it, "passionate!"

"Oh my!" says he. "Is that so?"

"Indeed. I weep for the strong arms of a man, the dart of Cupid hath pierced my heart, I am not prone to argue . . ."

"I see," he clears his throat. "And you have lured me here for this specific reason?"

"Yes", I reply, softly.
"And you did something to my crew?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Kiss me and I'll tell you."

"All right."

He does. Aphrodite! What a fine feeling after all those centuries!

"What did you do with them?"

"I kissed them," say I, "and they were metamorphosed into animals."

"Goodness!" he exclaims, quickly surveying his person. "And you are such a lovely creature!"

"Now you're getting with it," I agree. "You are one of those rare brutes my kiss does not affect with tails, tusks, hooves, horns, or suchlike impedimenta."

"Can you change my men back?"

"I might, if you ask me—very nicely."

"You—you're a sorceress!" he suddenly realizes. "I had always presumed they were but the fabrications of the unlearned. Can you work other magic?"

"You bet. Want some moonlight?"

I snap my fingers and the roof disappears. A gentle, inspiring moon hovers above us.

"Amazing! Oh my! Oh my! It is almost too much to ask—"

"What, dearest?" I nestle up

against him. "Ask away, and Big Mama will make with the conjure."

A long, loud silence.

Finally, voice shaking, he asks it.

"Can you make me a man?"

"Wha?"

"A man," he repeats. "I am an android, as are all the captains of deep space cruisers these days. This is because we are more stable, single-minded, and less emotional than our human brothers."

"Brother!" exclaim I, getting to my feet and reaching for my robe. "Oh brother!"

"Sorry, Jack," I finally pronounce, "I am just a sorceress. It would take a goddess to make you—anything."

"Oh," says he, sadly, "I suppose that it was too much to hope for. I have always wondered how people feel. It would have been so stimulating . . ."

* * *

I stalk away through the night. With some coaching he might make the vegetable kingdom next avatar. Stimulating!

Rounding up his scurvy crew, I—ugh!—kiss them all back into human form. I have to! He needs them to man the ship, and I can't have him slew-footing around looking virile, and at the same time as useful as a pinup in a monastery. Stimulating!

Someday my prince will come.

THE END

Sooner or later, man must tackle the job of clearing the space lanes—disposing of the dead, dangerous derelicts he has so lightly sown. Perhaps he can use a . . .

Cosmic Wrecker

By FRANK TINSLEY

BUMBLING round and round, some seventy miles above the Moon's fissured surface, an abandoned satellite whirls in half forgotten orbit. Launched more than a decade ago, it had soon exhausted its primitive power-pack and the outmoded instruments in its sterile belly have long since stuttered to a halt. It is just a piece of scientific junk cluttering up the Lunar spaceways.

Our cosmic corpse has just one consolation—it is not alone. For since that historic day in October, 1957, when the brave beep-beep of Sputnik I ushered in the space age, well over a hundred man-made satellites have been shot into orbit. Some of these were short-lived models which, after a day or two of cosmic circling, returned to Earth or were consumed in the atmosphere. Two "Luniks" and a

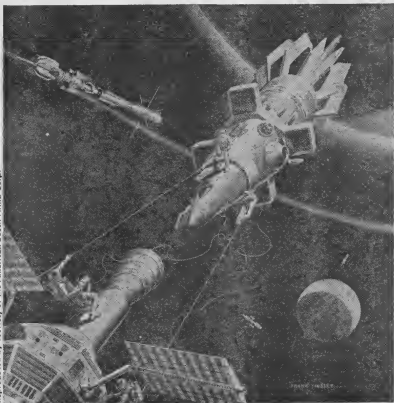
"Ranger" flew further afield and crash landed on the Moon. The others—over fifty of them to date—are still up there, whirling aimlessly in space. Except for a dozen or so U. S. vehicles that continue to signal back their assigned collections of data, all are dead hunks of machinery, some freighted with expended electronic gear, some with the frozen corpses of defunct laboratory animals. If rumor can be believed, there may even be a trio of red-starred man carriers, one said to carry the body of an intrepid Russian girl who gambled her life on being a cosmic Columbus—and lost!

During the coming decade, upwards of 260 satellite launchings are planned by the U.S. Space Agency. There can be little doubt that the USSR will counter with at least as many of their own. Other nations, now getting into

the act, will contribute still another quota. By the close of the 1960s our solar system may be cluttered with 5- or 6-hundred assorted Moon Probes, Venus Visitors and Mars Observers. In all probability, a higher percentage of these future vehicles will continue to be functioning space stations. In the main, however, they will be clunkers occupying all the better circuits.

Now that really big boosters

are coming along and man-carrying capsules are growing in size and crew capacity, the frequency and scope of space exploration is bound to expand. For the safety of these latter day Magellans, the clutter of defunct and dangerous derelicts must be disposed of. It will be no easy job. Obviously, they can't be just blown up or sunk as the Coast Guard destroys marine wrecks. For space, as we all know, has



neither surface, depth nor bottom and there is nowhere for a hulk to sink. And an exploded satellite will merely become a cloud of scattered debris, continuing in orbit for a considerable time.

THE only apparent solution is to push the electronic corpse out of its eternal circle, or slow it down until its orbital balance is upset and it falls toward its host planet. Here, it will either burn up, or in the case of airless globes, impact on the surface. This tricky operation can be performed only by a specialized space vehicle—a sort of cosmic towboat—and in this article, we will sketch out one possible form of such a machine.

Operating exclusively in weightless, frictionless space, our towboat has no need for super-powered rockets. Its extended missions and the enormous distances involved indicates electro-particle propulsion as the most economical drive system. And as this requires a constant supply of electric power, both in sunlight and shadow, an atomic reactor becomes the logical source. Moreover, tomorrow's portable piles promise to be simple, compact and long-lived enough to fit into our tight, towboat geometry. So we have therefore selected the combination of an atomic reactor to generate

heat, a thermionic converter system to convert this heat into electric current and the ion type of propulsion to translate the current into thrust.

The principle of thermoelectric power generation is an old one which because of its low efficiency and miniscule output, was relegated to the status of a laboratory experiment. Back in the early days of the century, Thomas A. Edison discovered that a white hot metal "boils" electrons out of its surface. This "Edison effect" became the basis of future radio tubes in which electrons, boiled off hot wires, are collected by a cold plate within a vacuum tube. A more modern application of this principle is the Cesium Cell Converter which employs cesium vapor to facilitate the electron flow and thus produce alternating current. The hot and cold plates act as the poles of a battery. The hotter and colder they are, the more efficient the battery becomes.

The advent of the atomic spaceship opens up new possibilities for this form of power generation. The enormous waste heat of atomic reaction can be coupled to the hot plate, and the intense cold of outer space to the cold one, resulting in a super-efficient source of electricity in a simple, rugged structure without moving parts. Several variations of this basic system are now op-

erating in research laboratories and are expected to provide lightweight, ultra-dependable power for tomorrow's space vehicles. One is a thermionic unit jointly developed by Radio Corporation of America and the Thiokol Chemical Corporation. It is designed for use in the hot casings of jet engines and the nozzles of space rockets. The initial units are expected to produce 250 watts per square centimeter with efficiencies of 35%. Theoretically, more than 1,000 watts per centimeter are possible with a 64% efficiency! The system promises great economy—one dollar per watt versus \$1,200.00 for solar cells. The cost of the reactor will of course, cut down this dazzling differential.

In the towboat design illustrated on page 77, the thermionic converter is laid out in the form of twelve large-area fins, radiating outward from a center reactor. The latter is jacketed with light shielding which picks up the heat of fission and carries it out through the core of each fin. The hot plates of the battery are mounted on the faces of this core. Cold plates, forming the outer skin of the fin, are exposed to the vacuum of space and the working gap between the plates is filled with Cesium vapor. At the forward end of the central reactor housing, a circular shield absorbs harmful emanations and

envelops the towboat hull and crew in a safe "radiation shadow." Alternating current generated by the converter passes around the shield and into banks of storage batteries. From these, it is fed to the propulsion system and auxiliaries.

DURING the past year, practical ion propulsion engines have been developed and tested by several U.S. research labs. It is expected that by the late 60s advanced types capable of attitude and directional control will be ready for service. While the thrust potentials of these engines are dwarfed by today's chemical rockets, they will prove ample in weightless, friction-free space. For unlike present fire-belching boosters, which burn out in minutes and then coast for the balance of the trip, electroparticle rockets operate continuously from start to finish. So if the notion of a tiny, ten-pound thrust pushing a ten-ton vehicle seems ridiculous, remember that sound calculations have shown that over a month's operation, Tiny Tim will build up to a speed of 25,000 m.p.h.! During a specific flight, the vehicle will gradually accelerate to the half-way point, then reverse itself end for end and use its engines to brake it for the second half. It will thus arrive at its destination at the same rate at which it started. In

the case of our Towboat, terminal speeds can be preselected to match the orbital speed of the derelict it intends to pick up. The design shown has four ion engines with a forward propulsion area of 400 square feet, an equal area for reverse and small top and side areas for maneuvering.

In pick-up operations, the Towboat moves into orbit behind its target, slowly closing the gap between them. When within reach, space-suited crewmen exit through airlocks on either side of the control room. Using individual reaction bottles, they carry lines to the dead satellite and clamp them to its tail surfaces. They then return to the tug and winch it forward until its nose cone is snug in the satellite's rocket nozzle. A set of powerful arms clamp around the nozzle's exterior, the lines are retrieved and our tug is ready for action. Its ion engines are switched into

full reverse and the linked machines gradually lose momentum. Slowly, the satellite's orbital balance is broken and its lowered speed heads it gently Moonward. Slower and slower it goes and more and more the angle of descent steepens. At last, when the downward spiral is irretrievable, the Towboat unclasps its arms, again reverses its engines and permits the defunct satellite to continue on and crash on the Lunar surface. In the case of machines in Earth or Venus orbits, the derelict will be consumed by the friction of the thickening atmosphere.

Like the space lifeboat shown in a previous issue, this cosmic wrecking truck may seem a bit premature to the unimaginative reader. However, it is presented as a possible solution to an inevitable dilemma—facing today the problems we will have to meet tomorrow.

THE END



Somebody Up There Hates Us

By DAVID R. BUNCH

Everybody has a secret wish.

All you have to do is show them a way to get it.

And, boy, what a deal you can work out!

THIS was way back, ten years ago, when 1972 was just tail-ending out. We called ourselves the space-agers even then, but that was mainly hopeful thinking. Oh sure, we'd been to the moon and around a bit like that by multiple staging rockets, throwing up space stations and going to a lot of real hard awkward effort. But actually we'd been too busy building up automatic luxury right here at home—everything atomomatic, you know—to make any really good progress toward interplanetary travel. And if what happened that New Year's Eve at Tuunt's ten years ago is any criterion, I'd say someone Out There already has the drop on us anyway.

By about ten o'clock that night I could see things were apt to shape up toward midnight in

extra-fine New Year's style. Tuunt's, a spacious night club on the eastern edge of Central time belt, was a place that tastefully combined the ancient and the modern, going back to the gray Fifties for atmosphere, and tonight the atomomatic bartenders were sending our drinks out fast as they could in miniature vehicles that recalled the slower time. Everyone was getting agreeably drunk on good space-age spirits, and what was happening at Tuunt's was, in its essentials, being duplicated all across the country.

My eighth old-fashioned space squeezings special had just rolled in by Super Chief on the little railroad track leading to our table, and my companion, my wife so it happened, had just taken her whiskey-sour by Greyhound bus. When this guy rolled in. Yes,

rolled! He was round as a ball, body-wise, near as I could see (and I still could see, this New Year's Eve toward midnight) but I disregarded his body roundness. All of us space-age frequenters of bars are apt to be round like a ball, body-wise. But none of us stop there; we go on to have round tubby legs and arms, and fat heads. But this guy! His shoes, big fat-toed things like scared types used to wear at the steel mills, were right on to what you might call the bottom arc of his stomach. And he didn't walk on them, near as I could see; he rolled on them, and inched like an egg sometimes will go across a smooth table. Yeah, he was mighty low to the

floor for New Year's Eve an hour or so from midnight. Or anytime!

I LOOKED at my old-fashioned, and then I looked at my wife. No help there, because she was absorbed in watching a nearby table get a load of beer by 'fast' freight. I fearfully looked back to the floor. He was rolling on down. A big black hat like a thin metal lid was on his head, or should I say it was on the up arc of his stomach? He paused a little moment and then, lightly as a floating leaf, flipped himself to the top of the bar where he could survey the big crowd at Tuunt's. I don't know what the rest thought; I thought I had got



Illustrated by SUMMERS

drunk too fast to appreciate the joke.

When he clapped off his hat, I noticed for the first time that he had arms and hands. His hands were very fat, but his arms strangely enough were thin; mere rods they were that seemed to fit, when not in use, into little grooves in his sides. His eyes, loving and brown they appeared, had been under his hat, and now they looked at me, seemed to look only at me. But that was a trick he had. "Uk uk uk," he chuckled like a jolly fat man pleased with everything. "All hardworking folks here. All just good hardworking heaven-trusters of Earth who deserve a break." Naturally his voice couldn't sound quite normal coming out of a ball. But it was plain understandable English, even if a little gritty like maybe he had sand under his tongue or someone had salted his tapes. My wife dug her space-ager detachable fingers into my arm and yelled, "Who is —?" "Never mind," I said, "Darling. It's New Year's. Ouch!" She removed her detachable fingers and felt of my arm, old fingers, and said she was sorry. She snuggled, but I knew her well enough to know it wasn't love; she was merely excited.

"All down-to-Earth folks who deserve a break. So —" Then he removed a lid from his side, and I swear I hadn't noticed till then

that the clothes he was wearing were only painted on. He took a box out from where he had opened the lid, and it was a large box, one about the size of a shoe box for space-travel shoes. "What is —?" my wife repeated, and I started again, "Never mind Darling, it's—" But he had opened the box! Hundreds of things sprang up; bright colors there were and a chaos of movement. "The wish box! uk ukle ugk," said the ball on the bar, in his peculiar gritty way. "All hardworking deserving down-to-Earth types here, trying to make resolutions and bang up a New Year's time. But here's the wish box!"

We all forgot our fears—if anyone was sober enough to have them—and crowded around the big black ball. "Uk ukle ugk, don't crowd, folks. There's one for each and every good folk here. And the fee is small, real small." We went right on crowding, and we started to trample each other—just normal space-ager Americans eager for first go at a good thing cheap. "Stop crowding!" the round one gritted a little sharply, "or I may find myself and my gift boxes unnecessary." We quieted a little, picked up a few who were down, and I wondered just what he could have meant there at the last. Oh well, concentrate on the wish, that's always the best thing to do. I looked at my wife of

twelve long space-age years, and there wasn't any doubt what I would wish. She looked at me—

AS if he had read minds that night, he said, "No use wishing to be rid of someone. Why waste a wish? Make a good one, you heaventrusters. The rest follows." I wondered again, but I concentrated on a new wish. I looked at my wife again. I decided to ask for a long trip from home. My wife looked at me. With distaste. Oh well—

"Now here's the way it works, folks. All think up a wish and then file by in an orderly way and whisper it to my ear." He turned a certain part of himself toward the crowd and pointed to his ear, a strange pear-shaped cup in his side. But even my wife was too intent and excited now to be alarmed at his ear; we all accepted it as the best and most normal of things to whisper into. "When you have selected your wish, I will give you the proper tools, all you good people here. The purchase price? Only the simple promise that you will all, each and everyone, wait until midnight to make your wish come true."

We each filed by and gave the ball 'man' our dearest wish and our promise. And he seemed careful about selecting the tools that would make the wishes real. There appeared to be a different

set of bright and moving colored things on sticks for each of us. But everyone got the same identical version of a little gray box selected from an opening just down from where he had removed his hat. To each of us he said, handing us the box, "Be careful with this; it is what makes all the little movements and bright shapes bring out the dream. Try it at midnight! Uk ukle."

Well, there we all sat after the last wish had been told to the pear-shaped ear and the jolly ball 'man' had retrieved his lid and hat. In a kind of half-drunken stupefaction we watched him quietly fall to the floor and start moving up the aisle in his peculiar inching toddle-roll, until he was gone, quite gone out the night club door. Then the freeze of a strange tension settled over all the tables there. We all wondered what we had, how it would work, how we should feel, but none bothered to doubt, I believe, the strange round 'man' and his promises. I know I did not. For it was New Year's Eve, with the spacedripper spirits deluxe, and besides we had sort of got used to the miracles, in this space age of ours. But this Aladdin-like granting of a dearest wish just by color movement hocus-pocus and a tiny gray box—well, it would be a different kind of novelty and might shake up our jaded senses, by now more than a trifle over-

satisfied from all manner of wondrous things.

With more than an hour to go my wife and most of the other women had opened their little gray boxes. They were examining the contents, reading into the instructions and fingering the head-harness and the thin strips of heavy leadlike metal. And there was a diagram showing clearly how to adjust the straps and the metal strips to the dream-wisher's head, just before a small plug with many tinelike prongs was inserted into a socket on a sealed compartment of the gray box. CLUTCH FIRMLY THE STICK WITH THE MOVING COLORS AND SHAPES, THINK ONLY OF YOUR DREAM, THEN MAKE THE CONNECTION. So the instructions ran.

IT was just a second or so past eleven P. M. in Central time belt when our atomomatic chief bartender got the call. Another atomomatic chief bartender, from some place on Long Island, had contacted him through a kind of metal telepathy they've worked out. (None of us knows quite how they do this, although there's many a theory). After he got the message our 'boy' started acting very strange. He'd whirl up a little way on his flexible track, then cut back the other direction and finally just stop dead on his rail to jitter-jig for a spell; if he had been human I

suspect he would have been wringing his hands. I know now he was just trying to figure out some way to tell us the message he had received from Eastern time belt. Oh no, atomomatic bartenders can't talk. Whoever would have thought an atomomatic bartender, or any kind, would need to? Sure, they can listen. For that they come equipped with twenty-five little buttonhole ears conveniently located along the metal knob. And if you want to cry while you tell them, they can nod the knob sympathetically enough and the gears in them will go *clk clk clk*. But they can't talk. No sir, that has been quite properly left out.

But he got us the message all right, and that, together with tests on the strange granules from the sealed compartment of the gray boxes, is why we've been at these space-age civil defenses ever since.—You think these defenses are strange, huh, these acres and acres of concrete with the ball-shaped humps and the holes? And the double rollers—powered to roll both ways—we're throwing up beyond that? And the huge, tons-heavy, steel ball bats circling up on pylons everywhere, swinging constantly 360 degrees from the ground up to a mile. Well, imagine you were a ball, Mister, trying to get somewhere to do damage. Suppose you were from Out There

and you and your pals had slipped some 200,000,000 space-ager Americans a wish-box to use at midnight New Year's Eve—indeed, had presented nearly an entire adult population these attractive gifts. And further suppose you and your pals didn't yet realize that you had slipped up concerning the time belts. Wouldn't you be back any day now to claim your base of operations where the strongest Earth nation had, shall we say, wished itself to death? For you see, the tricky part about the wish-box was, when you inserted the tiny plug, strange granules in the sealed compartment acted, reacted, and your head came very quickly off, and messily, to the tune of a big blammy noise. And your wish? Well, in heaven, or somewhere like, let us trust.

What's that? You're wondering what the atomomatic chief bartender finally did? It was real smart what he finally did, and he

and all the other chief bartenders west of the Eastern time belt earned the green-label cluster to their Big-Martini crosses that night. For devotion to humans, far beyond the call. By clicking his rail he sent out the message in old-fashioned telegrapher's code, over and over he did this, until enough of us got it and warned the rest—WISHES WERE DEATH AT MIDNIGHT E. S. T. Then he broadcast the message, through the metal telepathy, to all the other chief bartenders west from us far as the Pacific Ocean. And they all figured out some way to tell the people and most of the people were saved, except of course those Eastern time belters, who are in heaven, let us pray. Oh sure, a few women, I understand, in the other time belts went ahead just out of an irresistible curiosity strictly female. But my wife? OH NO!

THE END

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LESTER del REY

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

Photo by DAVID FIELD



AN accident in an atomic energy plant . . . The chance formation of an isotope which upon reaching critical mass could blow half the United States off the map . . . The only man who might save the situation buried in the radioactive debris . . . There you have the taut situation served readers of Lester del Rey's *Nerves* in the September, 1942, *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION*. The story's value as prophecy is self-evident. It was an attempt to write a "realistic" drama in the setting of a hypothetical atomic energy plant before the Manhattan Project had barely gotten underway. There had been other stories on the identical theme but none of them possessed the crisp immediacy of this tale. What amazed the read-

ers most was that the story was the work of an author whose reputation had been built on quasi-poetic tear-jerkers. So chilling a blast of "naturalism" called for a second look at Lester del Rey.

The mother of Ramón Felipe San Juan Mario Silvio Enrico Smith Heathcourt-Brace Sierray Alvarez-del Rey y de los Uerdes died a few days after his birth on June 2, 1915, in Clydesdale, Minnesota. He never forgave her. Twenty-nine years later, writing as Lester del Rey, his short story, *Kindness*, in the April, 1944, *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION*, echoed his feelings: "Danny was only a leftover, the last normal man in the world of supermen, hating the fact that he had been born and that his moth-

er had died at his birth to leave him only loneliness as his heritage."

This had been the third marriage for his father, Francisco Sierra E. Alvarez del Rey, a 55-year-old carpenter and tenant farmer. The father's background was only partially Spanish; his great-grandfather, one of a line of militant athiests in Spain, had to flee to France after hanging three priests who came out to question him during the Inquisition. The family came to the U.S. before 1750 and through the generations acquired English, Scotch, German, and Indian blood. His mother, Jane Knapp, was English and New England Yankee.

The woman who acted as Ramón's nurse after his mother died eventually married his father. The sod-floor shack they lived in was so vermin-ridden that the family frequently slept outside in a tent in the summer. As a child of a dirt farmer Ramón del Rey literally did not have enough to eat. The never-ending malnutrition left him a delicate wisp of a child, in contrast to his father, who despite having lost an arm in the Spanish-American War, was physically powerful.

Fear of physical violence aroused emotions that were precariously balanced between desperation and cowardice in the boy. One day, when he was only

four, his stepmother threatened him with a beating. Almost frantic, tiny Ramón grabbed the kitchen knife and held her at bay until his father got home. His stepmother washed her hands of him after that, and an uneasy state of coexistence was established with the boy answerable only to his father. As he grew older he frequently prepared his own meals. Except when his father was home, he was an outsider living in the home on sufferance.

DEL REY'S father, though poorly educated, respected learning and was surprisingly well-read. He introduced the boy to the theories of Charles Darwin, and taught him algebra. An atheist, he nevertheless felt that his son should have religious training and arranged to have him attend Catholic Sunday School. Ramón went to grade school at Utica, Minn. His school attendance was irregular, for he worked with his father at carpentry, and was paid a part of whatever his father earned. Out of this money little Ramón bought his own clothes; his father was always more of a co-worker than a pal.

Somehow Lester managed to finish grade school by 12 frequently completing two semesters concurrently. His father let him spend the summer of 1927 with a circus, working with a

knock-down-the-milk-bottles concession. For the first time in his life del Rey got three meals a day on a regular basis. He returned for one year of high school and then, all of 13, hitchhiked to Yakima, Ore., where he picked fruit, carried water to grain harvesters and lumberjacks, and finally returned to his father in St. Charles, Minn. After attempting to catch up on his schooling he was off again, this time to Chicago where he survived by doing odd jobs including being a bootblack and a newsstand attendant.

This became the pattern of his life. His next trip was out to California where the questionable ability to prepare his own meals secured him employment as a short-order cook. Then he was off to Mexico for three weeks. Then he read a romantic tale of Alaska by William MacLeod Raine, and promptly got a job as a steward on an Alaskan steamer. A single day in Alaska convinced him that most of its glamour reposed in Raine's fancy, and he turned around and came back.

Del Rey liked to read for "escape." He had long enjoyed Jules Verne and H. G. Wells and, beginning with *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar*, periodically ordered Burroughs' Tarzan novels at 49¢ each from a Sears-Roebuck catalogue. But he really went overboard on science fiction when a

friend loaned him a copy of the Fall, 1929, SCIENCE WONDER QUARTERLY featuring Otto Gail's *The Shot Into Infinity*. As a result, his mail-order book buying now expanded to include Burroughs' Martian novels.

WORKING with bootleggers in a New Mexican town in 1930, del Rey met a girl and proposed to her the same day. He was only 15, but managed to convince officials he was older. The marriage ended in tragedy three months later when his wife was thrown from a horse and died of her injuries. Del Rey returned again to Minnesota where, in the summer of 1931, he managed to get a certificate of completion of high school, though he never formally graduated. A librarian in St. Charles encouraged him to go to college. Carlton College, in Minnesota, had been given a grant by del Rey's grandfather. It was felt they might be willing to extend him a scholarship in return. Del Rey's father also wrote to his half-brother, George L. Knapp, in Washington, D. C., to see what he might do. Both gambits paid off. Carlton College offered a scholarship, and Knapp volunteered to pay del Rey's tuition at George Washington University, and give him a room in his own home.

The latter offer was accepted. Del Rey found that Knapp, who

had a daughter with a Ph.D. in chemistry, but no son, treated him with fatherly kindness. There was something else they would eventually have in common. Knapp was the editor of a railroad brotherhood weekly newspaper called LABOR. He had been a writer, and among his published works was a science fiction novel, as well as a quartet of shorter science-fantasies. At George Washington University del Rey majored in journalism and took a general course in the sciences, but he didn't have the slightest conception of what he wanted to be. After two terms he dropped out of college. He decided to take a course in shorthand and typing as a way of gaining entrée to firms where he might find some type of work he liked. The best the course did for him during the depression years, was to help him get a job as an office boy and comptometer operator at the Crane Plumbing Co. in Washington, D.C. in 1934. He held that job until 1937.

THEN occurred one of those freak bits of luck. Del Rey went to a Maryland gambling house one day in 1934 with \$100 and began to play roulette. He wound up with \$6,000, bought a little restaurant, employing others to run it, and left his uncle's home for his own lodging. His luck didn't last long. Letters

from home told of personal problems that urgently required substantial sums of money. On top of that, del Rey's poor eating habits and the acquisition of a drinking problem were playing hob with his none-too-hardy constitution. To raise the money for his family's problems and his own he was forced to sell the restaurant in 1935. Then the news came that his father and his entire family had died in an auto accident. Eventually, he became so ill that only a major operation could save his life, and then he found himself without the physical energy to do an effective day's work at his job with the Crane Plumbing Co., which he had held on to all this time. He was fired and found himself broke.

To survive, del Rey sold magazines door to door, worked in restaurants, and did research for a man working on a bibliography of music in the United States. Del Rey averaged \$5 a week. But even during this grim period del Rey was not without his literary interests. He had a deep love of Swinburne's poetry; others who intrigued him were Browning, Burns, Milton and Kipling. Among American poets, Stephen Vincent Benet was his favorite. Although del Rey decried Longfellow, a number of the titles of his stories are quotations from that poet, among them *The Day is Done* and *The Wings of Night*.

During 1933 del Rey began writing verse, and claims to have sold 20 poems under pen names to markets as prominent as LADIES HOME JOURNAL and GOOD HOUSE-KEEPING. Then he abruptly decided he wasn't a poet and quit writing verse in 1936.

When he picked up the Aug. 1932, AMAZING STORIES with John W. Campbell's *The Last Evolution*, a philosophical story in which robots evolve into pure intelligences, del Rey resumed reading science fiction on a regular basis. His favorite writers were John Campbell, Raymond Z. Gallun, Jack Williamson, and Stanley G. Weinbaum. The influence of all these writers is clearly revealed in del Rey's early fiction, but in the efforts of his relatively more mature years no one shaper is as powerfully evident as Clifford D. Simak.

DURING this period in the development of science fiction, fan magazines were few; fans gained renown by the frequency and length of their letters in the readers' columns. Del Rey was among the most prolific of this group. In the letters section of ASTOUNDING STORIES,—“Brass Tacks,” letters signed “Ramón F. Alvarez-del Rey” became a regular feature of the section. While del Rey enjoyed seeing his letters in print he had felt no compulsion to become a writer. The

transition occurred as a result of an argument between him and a girl friend. In the course of a discussion he had strongly criticized Manly Wade Wellman's handling of a near-human ape in *Outlaws of Callisto* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, April, 1936).

“If you think you are so much better, let's see you write one that ASTOUNDING will buy,” the girl taunted.

Del Rey was taken aback: “Will you settle for a reply from the editor saying he liked the story?”

The girl agreed. Del Rey figured that on the strength of his letter-writing reputation he might be able to swing that much. He sat down and wrote *The Faithful*, a tale of intelligent dogs made nearly human by the experiments of Paul Kenyon, last human survivor of a plague. The dogs remain instinctively loyal to him, for after 200,000 years of habit they are conditioned to serve. Before he dies, he brings them together with semi-civilized apes who will serve as their “hands.” He had kept his promise to rewrite Wellman's story in his own manner. Instead of a letter, a check for \$40 arrived in January, 1938, which del Rey triumphantly showed his girl.

Suddenly enthusiastic about writing, del Rey plunged into another story which grew into a 12,000 word novelette about ice-

mining on Mars. Campbell rejected it. Feeling that possibly the novelette was not his forté, del Rey returned to the short story form with a second-person yarn in future tense on the circle-in-time theme. Campbell did not like that one either. Years later it was rewritten from memory for GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION as *It Comes Out Here*.

Now discouraged, del Rey gave up on fiction and turned to other pursuits but when *The Faithful* appeared in the April, 1938, ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION reader reaction placed it second. As a result, del Rey received a letter from Campbell urging him to do more. Del Rey consulted *Writer's Yearbook* for Campbell's requirements. Among them he found: "even if the story is about a robot, there should be a human reaction." That gave him the idea for *Helen O'Loy*, whose heroine was an atom-powered thinking machine, made of metal with a spun plastic exterior fashioned to minutely resemble a woman. Feminine impulses were electronically built into the device. Helen falls in love with the man who owns her and, through a tender series of circumstances, succeeds in getting him to accept her as his wife.

IN retrospect, *The Faithful* was far more influential than *Helen O'Loy*. It is almost a certainty

that Clifford D. Simak's poignant development of the dogs in *City* took its cue from *The Faithful*.

When del Rey decided to test how well he could do as a full-time writer, Campbell suggested he take the theme of L. Sprague de Camp's delightful short story, *The Gnarly Man* (UNKNOWN, June, 1939), concerning the problems of a Neanderthal man in adjusting to modern civilization, and see if he could find a different approach. Result: *The Day is Done* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, May, 1939), in which the last Neanderthal man, living off of the charity of the early tribes of "modern man," dies of a broken heart. It proved a minor masterpiece.

Del Rey tried to crack UNKNOWN and did with *Forsaking All Others*, a poetic tale of a little oak dryad who falls in love with a human and sacrifices her immortality and the life of her tree to consummate their union.

Del Rey's opportunity to place a novelette came with *The Luck of Ignatz* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Aug., 1939) in which an intelligent Venusian reptilian pet brings anyone close to him ill luck. The story line was hackneyed, but a lengthy sequence where the space engineer redeems himself by running the ship manually for 60 hours after the automatic controls had been

knocked out, possessed elements of the tense drama that would later make *Nerves* a hit. The humanistic qualities of del Rey at their finest gleamed through in *The Coppersmith* (UNKNOWN, Sept., 1939) as the adventures of a proud and industrious elf to find a place for himself in a world where his solder and tools are no longer effective on the modern metals used in pots completely engages the reader's sympathies. A sequel, *Doubled in Brass* (UNKNOWN, Jan., 1940) was practically a command performance.

GROWING in confidence, del Rey began to experiment with themes and techniques. In *Habit* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Nov., 1939) he wrote a sport story about racing rockets; *The Smallest God* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, January 1940) proved an entertaining tale of a rubber doll turned into an animated creature when stuffed with a by-product of atomic fission; *Reincarnate* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, April, 1940) dealt with the transference of the personality of a horribly injured man into a mechanical body; and *Dark Mission* (ASTOUNDING, July 1940) concerned a Martian who comes to earth to delay the first flight to that planet until the germs of a deadly plague have dissipated.

LESTER DEL REY

The most successful story of that period with the readers was *The Stars Look Down* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Aug., 1940) in which two opposing men, one championing liquid rocket fuels, the other atomic engines, race to be the first in space. Like Moses in the Bible, the "winner" finds that because of his heart, he can never pilot the ship into "the promised land." Even then it was a variant on Heinlein's *Requiem*, and the passage of years has badly dated it. In the same issue he employed the pen name of Philip St. John for a short story, *Done With Eagles*; another pen name, Philip James, was employed for *Carillon of Skulls*, (UNKNOWN, Feb., 1941).

But the middle of 1940 marked the end of a phase in del Rey's career. He became involved in photography, spent most of his time in the darkroom rather than at a typewriter. Soon he was earning his living by making enlargements of five- and ten-cent photos which he hand-colored himself. Campbell tried hard, but del Rey would only come through with a story when he needed money for a special trip; otherwise he puttered happily in his darkroom. One of these infrequent stories was *The Wings of Night* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Mar., 1942) concerning the last living moon "man" who needs copper in order to repro-

duce his race. Told in del Rey's most sympathetic vein, it proved very effective; variations on the theme have shown up periodically since then.

DEL REY was particularly fond of *My Name is Legion* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, June, 1942) in which he thought up a hellish circle-in-time fate for Adolf Hitler. But his banner story for the year was *Nerves*. The readership poll rated it tops in the issue. Ignoring the impact created by *Nerves*, del Rey went to St. Louis on a romantic errand, wrote *Lunar Landing* (October, 1942 ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION) and went to work at McDonald Aircraft Co. as a sheetmetal worker and hand-former.

Del Rey's desire for anonymity must have burned bright in 1943, for out of three short stories, two were published under other names. *The Fifth Freedom* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, March, 1943) by "John Alvarez" was a plea for more enlightened treatment of conscientious objectors. *Whom The Gods Love* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, June, 1943) was a mystical war story of a World War II Pacific fighter pilot given a second chance to justify his dead buddies. Much more effective was *Renegade*, under the nom de plume of "Marion Henry" (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-

FICTION, July, 1943), a moving and tender story of the affection of a community of civilized apes in Africa for an ex-playboy who has tutored them. (Little known is the fact that del Rey sold a short short and a short love story to COLLIERS in 1943, neither one fantasy.)

Del Rey all 89 pounds and five foot four inches of him, moved to New York in 1944 and took a job as a counterman selling hamburgers. He succeeded in selling Campbell one story, *Kindness* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Oct., 1944). Now 30 and lonely, del Rey went on a date with Helen Schlaz, proposed to her that night, and married her. He then made another stab at writing. But when six stories in a row were rejected by Campbell, del Rey's confidence in his writing ability hit its nadir. His flagging spirits were raised, however, when Prime Press contracted for a hard cover collection of his stories to be titled ". . . and some were human." The publication of the book in 1948, containing some of his best work, bolstered a fading reputation.

AT the Fifth World science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia in 1947, del Rey was introduced to Scott Meredith, an enthusiastic science fiction fan who had built a flourishing liter-

ary agency in New York. Meredith signed him as a client. He also went to work for Meredith.

In 1949 his second marriage broke up. But the same year the del Rey name came back into the spotlight in an unusual manner. A fan sent a letter to Campbell proposing titles and authors for a mythical all-star issue. Campbell delighted his readers by attempting to fulfill the "prophecy." Among the stories requested was one by Lester del Rey to be titled *Over the Top*. Del Rey wrote this to order, and though it was a mediocre tale involving the first space explorer stranded on Mars, it proved psychologically important by placing del Rey on the same roster as Heinlein, van Vogt, Sturgeon and de Camp.

There was a boom in science fiction; and new titles were appearing. Del Rey dug his rejects out of the trunk and began offering them around. They sold with astonishing speed. Encouraged, he decided to leave Scott Meredith's employ and try his luck again at free-lancing. Swiftly his skills began to return. That year he also sold the first of a series of teen-age science fiction novels to Winston, *Marooned on Mars*; it won the Boys Award for Teen-Age Fiction that year.

A New York publisher named John Raymond asked del Rey to write a story for a projected new science fiction magazine, *SPACE*

SCIENCE FICTION. When del Rey delivered the story, *Pursuit*, Raymond asked him if he would like to edit the proposed magazine. The first issue, with *Pursuit*, a "chase" fantasy involving wild and unbelievable psi powers as its lead, was dated May, 1952; soon three other titles: *SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES*, *ROCKET STORIES* and *FANTASY MAGAZINE* were added as companions. Del Rey proved a superior editor, but conflict with the publisher over policy resulted in his resignation in late 1953.

DEL REY'S third marriage on July 23, 1954 was to Evelyn Harrison who proved the greatest stabilizing influence of his life. A few years after their marriage they bought a small home in River Plaza, N. J., only blocks away from the residence of Fred Pohl, an old friend. Pohl was editing a series of science fiction anthologies for Ballantine Books made up entirely of original stories. He commissioned del Rey to write a novelette for *Star Short Novels*, a paperback issued in 1954. Del Rey's contribution, *For I Am a Jealous People*, was a shocker in which earth is attacked by aliens who have the might of "Our God," the God of Abraham and Moses, behind them. The closing lines are memorably sacriligious: " 'God has ended the ancient covenants and

declared Himself an enemy of all mankind,' Amos said, and the chapel seemed to roll with his voice. 'I say this to you: He has found a worthy opponent.'

This was the cynical, hard line that people now began to associate with the new del Rey. It had been increasingly reflected in his fiction since *Nerves*. It was even more evident in his public speaking appearances, inaugurated at The Eastern Science Fiction Association (Newark, N. J.) meeting of Feb., 1948, where del Rey revealed a strong speaking voice and a rare ability to organize and expound his arguments. This talent eventually made him a regular guest on "The Long John Nebel Show," a "talk" program originating from WOR, New York, nightly from midnight to 5:00 A.M. In over 300 appearances to date, he incisively lampooned flying saucers, Shaverism, Dianetics, Abominable Snowmen, telepathy, psionics, and the broader spectrum of all superstitions and misconceptions which the human race is heir to.

Thus was created an image of Lester del Rey as a rebel, reformer and iconoclast—an illusion which his actions encouraged but which the facts refused to support. Del Rey's stories rarely involved social protest; particularly in the beginning, they were repeated pleas for society to make a place for the in-

dependent spirit. They are pilgrimages of loneliness. The characters do not ask for reform, *only for acceptance*. Del Rey never blames society for his problems. Rather he blames the limitations of his physical equipment. "The Smallest God," though superior in intelligence, chafes at his size and works toward and achieves his goal: transference into the body of a six-foot artificial man. Dave Mannen in *Over the Top*, when stranded on Mars with no hope of rescue, bitterly reflects: "With a Grade-A brain and a matinee idol's face, he'd been given a three-foot body and the brilliant future of a circus freak. It had looked like the big chance, then. Fame and statues they could keep, but the book and the endorsement rights would have put him where he could look down and laugh at the six-footers. And the guys with the electronic brains had cheated him out of it."

YET essentially del Rey's work reflects optimism. His stories hold forth hope for the individual and for Man. His personal hardships appear to have stirred in him deep feeling for, not hatred or resentment towards, the human race. Most of his endings are "happy" ones, though they frequently are the result of extraordinary compromises on

the part of the characters. His rages are directed at *patterns of thought* which he feels threaten the progress of mankind, rather than at individuals or institutions. Even his novel, *The Eleventh Commandment* (Regency Books, Jan., 1962) which at first glance appears to be a no-quarter-given attack on the Catholic Church's birth control policy, conforms to that pattern: It ends with the clergy's policy proven right in the framework of the hypothetical situation postulated in the book.

Again and again del Rey's work shows elements that have

influenced the course of science fiction, gained him a wide personal following and the respect of his contemporaries. His greatest drawback has been that he has never learned the lesson of self-discipline. His facade of toughness would seem to be fabricated more to maintain his own self-estimation than as a defense against the world. Nevertheless its manifestation in his writing represents a psychological conflict that dams up the release of a reservoir of compassion. When this is resolved, del Rey will find a promising future still before him.



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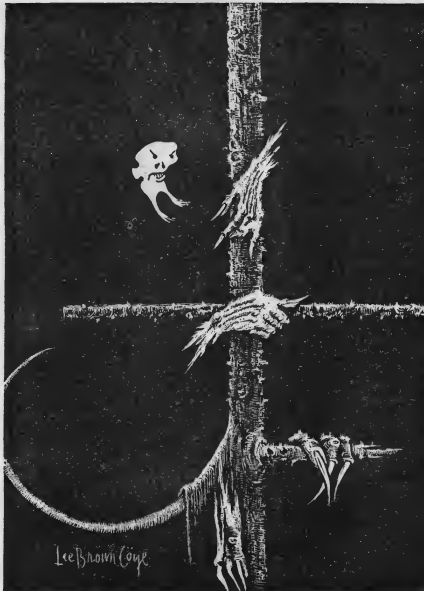
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Are you dissatisfied with the programs that come through your television set? Don't complain too much. Look what came through Miss Twilley's!

TELEVISION made Miss Enid Twilley's life endurable by providing the romance which life had withheld. So when the picture tube in her old-fashioned set blew out, it was a major crisis. But Ed Jacklin's phone didn't ring. The spare twenty eight inch tube in Jacklin's T.V. shop remained undisturbed on the shelf. And the drawn shades of Miss Twilley's living room gave

**FOR
SERVICE
RENDERED**

By J. F. BONE

Illustrated by COYE

no hint of what was happening behind them. The town of Ellenburg went its suburban way unaware of the crisis in its residential district.

Which was probably just as well.

Frozen with terror, Miss Twilley sat in spastic rigidity, her horrified eyes riveted on the thing in front of her. One moment she had been suffering emphatic pangs of unrequited love with a bosomy T.V. blonde, the next she was staring into a rectangular hole of Cimmerian blackness that writhed, twisted and disgorged a shape that made her tongue cleave to the roof of her mouth and her throat constrict against the scream that fought for release.

It wasn't a large shape but it was enormously impressive despite the lime green shorts and cloak that partially covered it. It was obviously reptilian. The red skin with its faint reticulated pattern of ancestral scales, the horns, the lidless eyes, the tapering flexible tail, the sinuous grace and Mephistophelean face were enough to identify it beyond doubt.

Her television set had disgorged the devil!

Silence draped the room in smothering folds as Miss Twilley's frozen eyeballs were caught and held for a moment by the devil's limpid green eyes whose

depths swirled for an instant with uncontrolled surprise. The devil looked around the room, at the closed drapes, the dim lights, the shabby furniture and the plate of cookies and the teapot on the tray beside Miss Twilley's chair. He shook his head.

"No pentacle, no candles or incense, no altar, no sacrifice. Not even a crystal ball," he murmured in an impeccable Savile Row accent. "My dear young woman—just *how* in Eblis' name did you do it? There isn't a single sixth order focus in this room."

"Do what?" Miss Twilley managed to croak.

"Construct a gateway", the devil said impatiently. "A bridge between your world and mine."

"I didn't," Miss Twilley said. "You came crawling out of the picture tube of my T.V. set—or what was the picture tube," she amended as her eyes strayed to the rectangle of darkness.

The devil turned and eyed the T.V. curiously, giving Miss Twilley an excellent view of his tail which protruded through a slit in his cloak. She eyed it with apprehension and distaste.

"Ah—I see," the devil murmured, "a third order electronic communicator transformed to a sixth order generator by an accidental short circuit. Most interesting. The statistical chances of this happening are about 1.75 to

the 25th power, give or take a couple of hundred thousand. You are an extremely fortunate human."

"That's not what I would call it," Miss Twilley said.

THE devil smiled, an act that made him look oddly like Krishna Menon. "You *are* disturbed," he said, "but you really needn't keep projecting such raw fear. I have no intention of harming you. Quite the contrary in fact."

Miss Twilley wasn't reassured. Devils with British accents were probably untrustworthy. "Why don't you go back to hell where you came from?" she asked pettishly.

"I wish," the devil said with a shade of annoyance in his beautifully modulated voice, "that you would stop using those terminal 'I's', I'm a Devi, not a devil—and my homeworld is Hel, not hell. One 'I', not two. I'm a species, not a spirit."

"It makes no difference," Miss Twilley said. "Either way you're disconcerting, particularly when you come slithering out of my T.V. set".

"It might give your television industry a bad name," the Devi agreed. "But there are many of your race who claim the device is an invention of mine."

"I don't enjoy being frightened," Miss Twilley said coldly.

She was rapidly recovering her normal self-possession. "And I would have felt much better if you had stayed where you belonged and minded your own business," she finished.

"But my dear young lady," the Devi protested. "I never dreamed that I would frighten you, and besides you *are* my business." He smiled gently at the suddenly refrozen Miss Twilley.

I must be dreaming, Miss Twilley thought wildly. This has to be a nightmare. After all, this is the Twentieth Century and there are no such things as devils.

"Of course there aren't," the Devi said.

"I only hope I wake up before I go stark raving mad!" Miss Twilley murmured. "Now he's answering before I say anything."

"You're not asleep," he said unreassuringly. "I merely read your mind." He grimaced distastefully. "And what a mass of fears, inhibitions, repressions, conventions and attitudes it is! Ugh! It's a good thing for your race that minds like yours are not in the majority. It would be disastrous. Or do you realize you're teetering on the verge of paranoia. You are badly in need of adjustment."

"I'm not! You're lying! You're the Father of Lies" she snapped.

"And liars (he made it sound like "lawyers") so I'm told. Nev-

ertheless I'm telling you the truth. I don't care to be confused with some anthropomorphic figment of your superstitious imagination. I'm as real as you are. I have a name—Lyf—just as yours is Enid Twilley. I'm the mardak of Gnoth, an important entity in my enclave. And I have no intention of seizing you and carrying you off to Hel. The Council would take an extremely dim view of such an action. Passing a human permanently across the hyperspatial gap that separates our worlds is a crime—unless consent in writing is obtained prior to such passage."

"I'll bet!"

"Are you calling me a liar?" Lyf asked softly.

"That's the general idea."

"There's a limit to human insolence," Lyf said icily. "No wonder some of my colleagues occasionally incinerate members of your race."

Miss Twilley choked back the crudity that fluttered on her lips.

"That's better", Lyf said approvingly. "You really should practice self control. It's good for you. And you shouldn't make assumptions based upon incomplete data. Your books that deal with my race are notoriously one-sided. I came through that gateway because you needed my help. And yet you'd chase me off without really knowing whether you want my services or not."

"I don't want any part of you," Miss Twilley said sincerely. "I don't need a thing you can give me. I'm healthy, fairly well off and—she was about to say "happy" but changed it quickly to "satisfied with things as they are." It wasn't *quite* a lie.

LYF looked at her critically. "Permit me to disagree," he said smoothly. "But you are wrong on every count. You are neither satisfied, wealthy nor happy. Frankly, Miss Twilley, you could use a great deal of help. In fact, you need it desperately."

"I am thirty eight years old," Miss Twilley said. "That's old enough to recognize a high pressure sales pitch. And you needn't be so insulting about my appearance. After all, I don't have my makeup on."

Lyf flinched. "I almost hate to do this," he murmured. "But you have doubted my honesty. Perhaps it is compensation to hide a feeling of inferiority. Primitive egos are notorious for such acts. But the truth is probably less harmful than permitting you to lie to yourself."

Miss Twilley jumped angrily to her feet. "How dare you call me a liar!" she snapped. She towered over the Devi, her tall bony body a knobby statue of wrath.

Lyf's eyes locked with hers. "Sit down," he said coldly.

And to her surprised consternation, she did. A physical force seemed to flow from him and force her back into the chair. She sat rigidly, seething with a mixture of fear and indignation as Lyf picked up his discourse where he had dropped it.

"You are not satisfied," he said quietly "because you are undernourished, ungainly, and ugly. You would like to be attractive. You wish to be admired. You long to be loved. Yet you are not."

"That's enough!" Miss Twilley snapped. "Neither man nor Devi has the right to insult me in my own house."

"I am not insulting you," Lyf said patiently. "I am telling you the truth. Now as for this business of being well-off, which I infer, means moderately wealthy—you are not. There was a small inheritance from your father, but through mismanagement and inept investments it is today less than fifteen thousand dollars, although it was fifty thousand when you received it a few years ago."

"You *are* the devil!" she gasped.

"I told you I could read your mind. I'm a telepath."

"I don't believe you. You found out somehow."

"You're not thinking," he said. "How could I? Now, as for your health, you will be dead in six months without my help. You

have adenocarcinoma of the pancreas which has already begun to metastasize. You cannot possibly survive with the present state of medicine your race possesses. Of course, your doctors do have ingenious ways of alleviating the pain," he added comfortingly, "like chordotomy and neurectomy".

Miss Twilley didn't recognize the last two words, but they sounded unpleasant. She *had* been worried about her health, but to hear this quiet-voiced death sentence paralyzed her with a cold crawling terror. "It's not true!" she gasped. Yet she knew it was.

"I could make a fortune as a diagnostician for your sham—your doctors", Lyf said. "It's as true as the fact that I'm a Devi from Hel. Actually, my dear Miss Twilley, I had no intention of coming here even though your gateway appeared in my library. But I was intrigued enough to scan through it. And when I saw you at the other end, frightened, diseased, and friendless, I could not help feeling pity for you. You needed my help badly." He sighed "Empathy is a Devi's weak point. Naturally I couldn't refuse your appeal." He shrugged. "At least I have offered to help, and my conscience is clear if you refuse." He wrapped his cloak around him with a movement of his lithe body that was symbolic. The case

had been stated. His part was done.

I HAVE nothing more to say", Lyf added. "If you do not wish me to stay I shall leave." He turned toward the T.V. set. "After I have vanished", he said over his shoulder "you may turn the set off. The gateway will disappear." He shrugged. "Next time I'll look for a sabbat or some other normal focal point before I enter a gateway. This has been thoroughly unsatisfying."

"Wait!" Miss Twilley gasped.

He paused. "Have you changed your mind?"

"Maybe."

"For a human female, that's quite a concession," he said, "but I'm a Devi. I need a more devinate- er- definite answer."

"Would you give me twenty four hours?" Miss Twilley said.

"So you can check my diagnosis?"

She nodded.

Lyf shrugged. "Why not. If your T.V. holds out that long, I'll give you that much time. Longer if necessary. You can't really be blamed for being a product of your culture—and your culture has rejected the Snake. It would be easier if you were a Taoist or a Yezidee.

"But I'm not," Miss Twilley said miserably. "And I can't help thinking of you as the Enemy."

"We Devi get blamed for a lot

of things," Lyf admitted, "and taken collectively there's some truth in them. We gave you basic knowledge of a number of things such as medicine, writing, law, and the scientific method. But we can't be blamed for the uses to which you have put them."

"Are you sure I have cancer?" she interrupted.

"Of the pancreas", he said.

"And you can cure it?"

"Easily. Anyone with a knowledge of fifth order techniques can manipulate cellular structures. There's very little I can't do, and with proper equipment about the only thing that can't be defeated is death. You've heard, I suppose, of tumors that have disappeared spontaneously." Miss Twilley nodded.

"Most of them are Devian work. Desperate humans sometimes use good sense, find a medium and generate a sixth order focus. And occasionally one of us will hear and come."

"And the others?"

"I don't know," Lyf said. "I could guess that some of you can crudely manipulate fifth order forces, but that would only be a guess." He spread his hands in a gesture of incomprehension incongruously Gallic. "I don't know why I'm taking all this trouble with you, but I will make a concession to your conditioning. See your doctors. And then, if you want my help, call through the

gateway. I'll probably hear you, but if I don't, keep calling."

The darkness where the picture tube had been writhed and swirled as he dove into it and vanished.

"Whew!" Miss Twilley said shakily. "*That was an experience!*"

She walked unsteadily toward the T.V. set. "I'd better turn this off just in case he gets an idea of coming back. Trust a *devil!* Hardly!" Her hand touched the switch and hesitated. "But perhaps he was telling the truth" she murmured doubtfully. "Maybe I'd better leave it on." She smiled wryly. "Anyway—it's insurance."

* * *

MISS TWILLEY," the doctor said slowly "can you take a shock?"

"I've done it before. What's the matter? Don't tell me that I have an adenocarcinoma of the pancreas that'll kill me in six months."

The doctor eyed her with startled surprise. "We haven't pinpointed the primary site, but the tests are positive. You do have an adenocarcinoma, and it has involved so many organs that we cannot operate. You have about six months left to live."

"My God!" Miss Twilley gasped. "He was telling the truth!"

"Who was telling—" the doc-

tor began. But he was talking to empty air. Miss Twilley had run from the office. The doctor sighed and shrugged. Probably he shouldn't have told her. One never can tell how these things will work out. She had the diagnosis right and she looked like a pretty hard customer. But she certainly didn't act like one.

* * *

Panting with fear, Enid Twilley unlocked the door of her house and dashed into the living room. Thank G— thank goodness! she thought with relief. The set was still working. The black tunnel was still there.

"Help!" she screamed. "Lyf! Please! come back!"

The blackness writhed and the Devi appeared. He was wearing an orange and purple striped outfit this time. Miss Twilley shuddered.

"Well?" Lyf asked.

"You were right," she said faintly. "The doctor says it's cancer. Will you cure me?"

"For a price," Luf said.

"But you said—"

"I said nothing except that I felt sorry for you and that I could cure you. Even your own doctors charge a fee."

"There had to be a catch in it," Miss Twilley said bitterly.

"It will be a fair price. It won't be excessive."

"My soul?" Miss Twilley whispered.

"Your soul? Ha! Just what would I do with your soul? It would be no use to me—assuming that you have one. No—I don't want your soul."

"Then what do you want?"

"Your body."

"So *that's* it!" Miss Twilley blushed a bright scarlet.

"Hmm'-with that color you're not bad looking." Lyf said.

"Would you want my body right away?"

"Of course not. That wouldn't be a fair contract. You should have use of it for a reasonable time on your homeworld. Say about ten years. After that it becomes mine."

"How long?"

"For the rest of your life."

"That doesn't seem quite fair. I'm thirty eight now. Ten years from now I'll be forty eight. I'll live perhaps to eighty. That gives you over thirty years."

"It gives you them, too," Lyf said.

"But your world is alien."

"Not entirely. There are quite a few humans on Hel. You'd have plenty of company."

"I can imagine," she said drily.

Lyf flinched. "I've told you I do not like those anthropomorphic references to my race."

"So you say. But I don't trust you even though you've told me the truth about my body. I won't sell my soul."

"I'll put a disclaimer in writ-

ing if that will satisfy you," Lyf said wearily. "I'm tired of haggling."

"But will you obey it?"

"With us Devi, a contract is sacred. Even your mythology tells you that much."

She nodded. "Of course, I'd want a few more things than health," she said. "I'd want to enjoy these ten years on earth."

"That is understandable. I'll consider any reasonable request."

"Beauty?"

"As you humans understand it. Sarcoplasty isn't too difficult."

"Wealth?"

"That's more difficult. And more expensive. But I could perhaps give you a one month chronograph survey. In that time you could probably arrange to become rich enough to be independent. But I can't guarantee unlimited funds. And besides you're not worth it."

Miss Twilley bridled briefly and then nodded. "That's fair enough I suppose. And there's one more thing. I want to be happy."

"I can do nothing about that. You make or lose your own happiness. I can provide you such tangible things as a healthy body, beauty and money, but what you do with them is entirely your own affair. No man or Devi can guarantee happiness". He paused and looked thoughtfully at a point above Miss Twil-

ley's head. "I could, perhaps, provide you with a talent such as singing or manual dexterity—and even make sufficient adjustments in your inhibitions so you could employ your skill. But that is all. Not even I can play Eblis."

MISS TWILLEY'S eyes glittered. If he could only do what he said it would be worth any payment he demanded. She had never been pretty. As a child she had been bony, ungainly, awkward and ugly. As an adult she had only lost the awkwardness. Boys had never liked her. Men avoided her. And she wanted desperately to be admired. And, of course, she was about to die. That alone would be reason enough. She was appalled at the thought of dying. At thirty eight she was too young. Perhaps thirty of forty years from now the prospect wouldn't be so terrifying, but not now—not when she hadn't lived at all. Life had suddenly become very precious, and its immediate extinction appalled her. She wasn't, she reflected wryly, the stuff from which heroes or martyrs were made, and ten years were a lot more than six months. As far as repayment was concerned it was a long way off, and Hel was probably not much worse than Ellenburg.

"In my opinion Hel's infinitely better," Lyf interjected."

"You're prejudiced," Miss Twilley said absently,—now if she had a figure like—hmm—say one of those movie actresses, and a face like—hmmm—and money to go with them—hmm—it just might be worth the price. Of course, it might not. It could be something like a salt mine—or—"

"It's nothing at all like a salt mine", Lyf said. "The hours are reasonable and there's plenty of free time outdoors if you want it. The food isn't the Cafe Ritz, but its nourishing, and the life is healthful. After all we Devils aren't savages."

"I wonder," she said thoughtfully—now if I could—hmm—say a gold lamé sheath dress—ah!—and perhaps in a bikini—

"Women!" Lyf sighed and gave up. Why should he bother about listing the disadvantage. She hadn't been listening to the advantages.

"What are you stopping for?" Miss Twilley demanded. "I'm listening."

"There are a few other things such as free medical care, splendid recreation facilities, and conducted tours of Hel."

"And the disadvantages?"

"Very few. There's no pay, of course, and you will be required to devote a certain amount of time to my service. On the whole, employment on Hel isn't much different than here except that it's a bit more enlightened."

"Like slavery?" Miss Twilley smiled unpleasantly. "You're not dealing with a fool."

"The concept of freedom is a relative thing," Lyf said. "And who among us, either Devi or human, is truly free. And what is the essential difference between being a slave to society and a slave to an individual? We Devi don't have such a high regard for physical liberty—"

"Obviously."

"But as long as you do your work, there's no interference with your outside activities. You can think and read as you please. We supply our help with a very complete library—and keep it up to date."

"Is that so?"

Lyf paled to a dull pink. "I wish you'd stop mentally dredging those old lies about fire and brimstone. They're embarrassing. It's been quite a few thousand years since a Devi has derived any satisfaction from sadism. We've removed that particular trait from our race. You won't be overworked or cruelly treated. And you won't be beaten or subjected to physical torture. Since I have no knowledge of what you might consider mental torture, I couldn't say whether there would be any or not. I think not, since no other human has complained of being mentally misused, but I can't tell."

WHY can't you? You can read my mind."

"Only your thoughts, not your emotions or attitudes."

Miss Twilley shrugged. "It sounds fair enough, but twenty or thirty years for ten is a high price."

"You fail to consider the costs involved. Your physical rehabilitation will be expensive and your financial even more so. I'll have to employ the Time Study Enclave to predict a financial plan for you, and chronography isn't cheap."

"Why can't you just give me the money?"

Lyf shrugged. "I don't have it—and I couldn't supply you with gold. It would be suspicious and we try to avoid attracting attention to our clients or ourselves. Humans have some rather messy ways of abrogating a fellow human's contract. So you acquire your wealth within the framework of your society—through the stock market in your case."

"Oh—I see."

"Your money is enough to start you off. I'll show you how to make it multiply."

"And if I cheat you?", Miss Twilley asked.

"You won't, I'm not utterly naive. There is a security clause in the contract which must be fulfilled."

"And what is that?"

"I put my mark on you. That

makes you a permanent sixth order focus I can contact at any time."

"That gives you quite an advantage."

"Have you ever read any contracts on your own world? I'm not asking for a thing more than your grantors do. In fact, not as much. Read a mortgage sometime if you don't believe me." Lyf eyed her with mild reproof. "Think, he said. "When—even in your perverted mythology—has one of my race failed to live up to his end of an agreement? Who has done the cheating? Who attempts to break contracts? Your whole history is filled with specious promises, broken words, and outright falsehood. Just why do you think we had to make contracts in the first place? Because you humans cheated at every opportunity. And you still do. That's why we must have guarantees. We go to all the expense, take all the risk and then run the added risk of being double crossed. That's too much."

"But our souls are beyond price."

"I've already told you that I care nothing for your soul. It's useless to me." He frowned. "We have had to fight that canard for centuries. We Devi are practical folk, not starry-eyed idealists. We deal in real property, not in intangibles. Now stop quibbling and make up your mind. You've

heard the concessions. After all, there is a limit to altruism. Now if you don't want to deal, say so and I'll leave. It will be no skin off my tail if you don't accept." Lyf half turned toward the T.V. set.

"I haven't said I wouldn't," Miss Twilley said.

"Nor have you said you would. Now speak up. My time's valuable."

"Oh—very well," Miss Twilley said sulkily. "I accept."

Lyf smiled, reached under his cloak and produced a long sheet of paper covered with writing. "You're a hard bargainer, Miss Twilley," he said. "You extracted every condition you could possibly get on a deal of this kind. My congratulations. This is a personal contract I had drawn up. It's in English so you can understand it. All you do is sign both copies. In transactions like this no witnesses are necessary."

"You don't mind if I read it first?" Miss Twilley said. "Not that I don't trust you—but this is business."

"Not at all," Lyf said "and please note the escape clause which allows you a peremptory withdraw if you are not satisfied with the basic services."

MISS TWILLEY eyed the paper, skipping over the legal jargon, but carefully reading the specific provisions. It was de-

ceptively simple and completely binding. But it didn't vary from Lyf's proposals. She would have ten years of health wealth and beauty, in return for which she would surrender her body to Lyf, mardak of Gnoth, to employ as he saw fit—within certain limits provided by the exceptions. She sighed. It was fair enough, she supposed. There were a few exceptions like the suicide clause that allowed Lyf to take immediate possession if she tried to kill herself, and the war clause which permitted him to remove her to a safe place for the duration of the conflict. She shrugged. There didn't seem to be anything wrong with it except the tone. Somehow it managed to convey the impression of a property rather than a personal transaction.

"It's always best to keep these things impersonal," The Devil said, "You sign on the bottom line underneath my cartouche."

Miss Twilley signed.

"And now," Lyf said briskly "there are a few formalities. Not that I don't trust you, of course, but business is business. Will you please disrobe?"

"Must I?"

Lyf nodded. "You must. I realize that this is embarrassing for you, but it would be infinitely more embarrassing if I placed my mark upon you while you were clothed."

Miss Twilley shivered a little

as she reached for the zipper of her skirt. But she had expected something like this.

Lyf looked at her critically. "You're worse than I thought," he said. "However, your skeleton seems structurally sound and well proportioned. Now please turn around."

Miss Twilley had hardly turned her back when a lance of numbing cold struck her in the base of the spine. She jumped involuntarily as Lyf's voice came to her ears.

"There—that does it." He walked past her and turned off the T.V. The black hole winked out, leaving a shattered picture tube where it had been. "Now that you're a sixth order focal point we can dispense with this monstrosity," he said. "The automatics on Hel will generate a new gateway shortly."

"Now what?" Miss Twilley asked. She wasn't sure that she liked the idea of being a sixth order focus.

"The mark leaves a small red lesion," Lyf said, "but it won't bother you. However, I should warn you not to attempt to have it removed. That could be quite painful and perhaps fatal." He moved in front of her. "I expect that we'd better start therapy right away. That tumor isn't going to be easy to remove." His eyes were level with her own, twin pools of clear bottomless

green with the darker spots of his pupils sharply demarcated from the surrounding iris. With mild surprise she realized that they were oval rather than round, and that their ellipses were growing—and encompassing her in their inner darkness.

LYF eyed her solicitously from a chair next to her bed. There was a faint proprietary glint in his eyes but his voice was as soft as ever. "It's all done Enid," he said. "How do you like it?"

Miss Twilley didn't like the use of her first name. It sounded entirely too familiar, but she supposed that there was little she could do about it. After all he did have certain rights, even though their full exercise was some years hence. She stirred sleepily. She was in her own bedroom and the bed that she had slept in these past eighteen years was familiar and comforting. Except for the Devi sitting beside her everything was normal down to the last fold of the flannel nightgown that covered her.

She felt oddly alive, and somehow different. There was a fullness to her body and a heaviness to her chest. She looked down and gasped with surprise and pleasure at the jutting rise of the nightgown. She *had* changed!

"That was the biggest part of the specifications," Lyf said with

the faintest hint of amusement in his voice. "Your mental patterns were extraordinarily precise about some things. About others I had to use my own judgment. I hope the overall effect meets with your approval."

Miss Twilley felt as excited as an adolescent on her first date. She slipped out of bed and padded on bare feet over to the vanity in the corner. Eagerly she eyed herself in the big mirror. Even in the nightgown she looked good. Her face was still her own but it had been subtly changed, the features smoothed and rearranged. Her pale blue eyes were now a smoky gray, and her plain mouse-brown hair had reddish glints in it and was much thicker than before. It was a very satisfactory face, smooth and beautiful, and years younger. Why—she looked barely twenty five!

With a quick movement she bent grasped the hem of her gown and pulled it over her head.

And gasped!

She had never dreamed of looking like this, even in her wildest flights of fancy!

"Like it?" Lyf asked from his seat in the corner.

"*Like* it!" she chortled. "I *adore* it!" How on Earth did you do it? You've not only made me beautiful, you've made me young!"

"I didn't do it on Earth", Lyf admitted. "I took you to Hel

where there's some decent equipment. It wasn't much," he added vaguely, "merely the application of some rather simple cellular biology—mostly a rearrangement of DNA molecules and a bit of sarcoplasty. Actually it wasn't too difficult. The removal of your tumor was much harder. You'll find that two weeks have gone from your life, but they've been well spent."

"I should say they have!" Miss Twilley said as she pirouetted slowly before the glass. Her brows knit in a tiny frown as she saw her only blemish, a bright red spot at the base of her spine.

"The mark can't be helped," Lyf said, "but it doesn't detract at all. And it won't show even in a bikini."

"Forty, twenty four, thirty six." Miss Twilley breathed. "Lyf—I could kiss you!"

"I'd rather you wouldn't," Lyf said. "There is, after all, a certain species incompatibility between yours and mine. Incidentally, you have perfect health. You'll never know a sick day for the rest of your life which should be quite long. And I gave you a fine singing voice, and a mental attitude that will let you use it."

"Thank you," Miss Twilley murmured as she stared at her reflection.

"I've left instructions for your financial operations on your dresser. Follow them and you'll

be financially independent. I think that does it. Everything is satisfactory, I trust."

"Completely," Miss Twilley breathed, never removing her eyes from the mirror.

"Then I shall be leaving."

MISS TWILLEY drew in a deep breath and observed the results with utter fascination. "Don't you think I'm beautiful?" she asked.

Lyf smiled. "Different worlds, different standards" he said. "Beautiful isn't quite the word I would use."

"What word *would* you use?"

"Useful," Lyf said.

"Useful? Hmm. What do you mean?"

"It should be obvious," Lyf said. "But I suppose it isn't. You humans are a strange lot. You assume. You don't reason. And it always shocks you to find that your assumptions are wrong."

Miss Twilley looked at him with wide eyes. A cold chill ran down her spine and poked tingling rootlets of ice into her viscera. "What have I assumed?"

"Do I have to answer that?"

Miss Twilley blushed. The effect was far more startling this time.

Lyf smiled with an air that would have been infuriating in a human but was somehow appropriate for a Devi. Miss Twilley sighed. At least *that* worry was removed.

"Perhaps I should give you a short synopsis of Devian society." Lyf said. "It's not like yours. Millennia ago our culture and technology evolved to the point where individual needs could be satisfied effortlessly. As a result we were compelled to consider group desires. Modern society on Hel is composed of enclaves with a community of interest plus certain ancillary groups that support them. The task of satisfying the desires of an enclave is infinitely more complex than satisfying an individual, which gives our civilization the necessary stimulus to progress.

"One of the reasons we deal with your world is to provide us with things impractical to produce upon our own. Another reason is amusement. If only you humans were not so savage we could perhaps arrange tours of Earth to observe you in your native haunts."

"Is that why—" Miss Twilley began.

He shook his head. "No—the importation of humans for ethnological studies has long since become a matter of interest only to highly specialized enclaves. *That* subject has been exhausted for popular satisfaction. We have tried to import other species, but they do not thrive on Hel, and it

takes a great deal of trouble merely to keep them alive. However, your race adapts so readily that even your cultural variations disappear in a few decades.

"It was this early importation and your ability to survive that has placed your race in such demand. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that your species cannot reproduce on our world, but the inhibitors we use to regulate our numbers also affect yours. Naturally, we can't risk a population explosion merely to reproduce your race. So we obtain more of you when necessary."

"Why?"

"Consider for a moment what might be valuable in a civilization that has no basic needs."

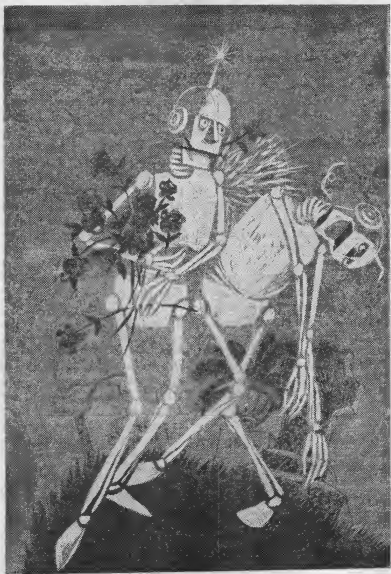
"Luxuries?"

"Precisely. As an ancillary system operator, I supply a luxury item to my fellow citizens. One that cannot be readily produced by our techniques. I said I was a mardak, but you never asked what it meant. You assumed it was a title. It is, but it's professional, not social. There are no classes on Hel, merely occupations."

"All right," Miss Twilley said reluctantly, "What is a mardak?"

"The closest analogy in your society," Lyf said, "is a dairyman."

THE END



The Stainless Steel Leech

By HARRISON DENMARK

Illustrator BLAIR

*No man — or machine — is a friend to the
werebot. Except Fritz. . . . a sort of man.*

THEY'RE really afraid of this place.

During the day they'll clank around the headstones, if they're ordered to, but even Central can't make them search at night, despite the ultras and the infras—and they'll never enter a mausoleum.

Which makes things nice for me.

They're superstitious, it's a part of the circuitry. They were designed to serve man, and during his brief time on the earth, awe and devotion, as well as dread, were automatic things. Even the last man, dead Kennington, commanded every robot in existence while he lived. His person was a thing of veneration, and all his orders were obeyed.

And a man is a man, alive or dead—which is why the grave-

yards are a combination of hell, heaven, and strange feedback, and will remain apart from the cities so long as the earth endures.

But even as I mock them they are looking behind the stones and peering into the gullies. They are searching for—and afraid they might find—me.

I, theunjunked, am legend. Once out of a million assemblies a defective such as I might appear and go undetected, until too late.

At will, I could cut the circuit that connected me with Central Control, and be a free 'bot, and master of my own movements. I liked to visit the cemeteries, because they were quiet and different from the maddening stamp-stamp of the presses and the clanking of the crowds; I liked

to look at the green and red and yellow and blue things that grew about the graves. And I did not fear these places, for that circuit, too, was defective. So when I was discovered they removed my vite-box and threw me on the junk heap.

But the next day I was gone, and their fear was great.

I no longer possess a self-contained power unit, but the freak coils within my chest act as storage batteries. They require frequent recharging, however, and there is only one way to do that.

The werebot is the most frightful legend whispered among the gleaming steel towers, when the night wind sighs with its burden of fears out of the past, from days when non-metal beings walked the earth. The half-lives, the preyers upon order, still cry darkness within the vite-box of every 'bot.

I, the discontent, the unjunked, live here in Rosewood Park, among the dogwood and myrtle, the headstones and broken angels, with Fritz—another legend—in our deep and peaceful mausoleum.

FRITZ is a vampire, which is a terrible and tragic thing. He is so undernourished that he can no longer move about, but he cannot die either, so he lies in his casket and dreams of times gone by. One day, he will ask me to carry him outside into the sun-

light, and I will watch him shrivel and dim into peace and nothingness and dust. I hope he does not ask me soon.

We talk. At night, when the moon is full and he feels strong enough, he tells me of his better days, in places called Austria and Hungary, where he, too, was feared and hunted.

". . . But only a stainless steel leech can get blood out of a stone—or a robot," he said last night. "It is a proud and lonely thing to be a stainless steel leech—you are possibly the only one of your kind in existence. Live up to your reputation! Hound them! Drain them! Leave your mark on a thousand steel throats!"

And he was right. He is always right. And he knows more about these things than I.

"Kennington!" his thin, bloodless lips smiled. "Oh, what a duel we fought! He was the last man on earth, and I the last vampire. For ten years I tried to drain him. I got at him twice, but he was from the Old Country and knew what precautions to take. Once he learned of my existence, he issued a wooden stake to every robot—but I had forty-two graves in those days and they never found me. They did come close, though. . . .

"But at night, ah, at night!" he chuckled. "Then things were reversed! I was the hunter and he the prey!

"I remember his frantic questing after the last few sprays of garlic and wolfsbane on earth, the crucifix assembly-lines he kept in operation around the clock—irreligious soul that he was! I was genuinely sorry when he died, in peace. Not so much because I hadn't gotten to drain him properly, but because he was a worthy opponent and a suitable antagonist. What a game we played!"

His husky voice weakened.

"He sleeps a scant three hundred paces from here, bleaching and dry. His is the great marble tomb by the gate . . . Please gather roses tomorrow and place them upon it."

I agreed that I would, for there is a closer kinship between the two of us than between myself and any 'bot, despite the dictates of resemblance. And I must keep my word, before this day passes into evening and although there are searchers above, for such is the law of my nature.

"Damn them! (He taught me that word.) Damn them!" I say. "I'm coming up! Beware, gentle 'bots! I shall walk among you and you shall not know me. I shall join in the search, and you will think I am one of you. I shall gather the red flowers for dead Kennington, rubbing shoulders with you, and Fritz will smile at the joke."

I CLIMB the cracked and hollow steps, the east already spilling twilight, and the sun half-lidded in the west.

I emerge.

The roses live on the wall across the road. From great twisting tubes of vine, with heads brighter than any rust, they burn like danger lights on a control panel, but moistly.

One, two, three roses for Kennington. Four, five . . .

"What are you doing, 'bot?"

"Gathering roses."

"You are supposed to be searching for the werebot. Has something damaged you?"

"No, I'm all right," I say, and I fix him where he stands, by bumping against his shoulder. The circuit completed, I drain his vite-box until I am filled.

"You are the werebot!" he intones weakly.

He falls with a crash.

. . . Six, seven, eight roses for Kennington, dead Kennington, dead as the 'bot at my feet—more dead—for he once lived a full, organic life, nearer to Fritz's or my own than to theirs.

"What happened here, 'bot?"

"He is stopped, and I am picking roses," I tell them.

There are four 'bots and an Over.

"It is time you left this place," I say. "Shortly it will be night and the werebot will walk. Leave, or he will end you."

"You stopped him!" says the Over. "You are the werebot!"

I bunch all the flowers against my chest with one arm and turn to face them. The Over, a large special-order 'bot, moves toward me. Others are approaching from all directions. He had sent out a call.

"You are a strange and terrible thing," he is saying, "and you must be junked, for the sake of the community."

He seizes me and I drop Kennington's flowers. I cannot drain him.

My coils are already loaded near their capacity, and he is specially insulated.

There are dozens around me now, fearing and hating. They will junk me and I will lie beside Kennington. "Rust in peace," they will say . . . I am sorry that I cannot keep my promise to Fritz.

"Release him!"

No!

It is shrouded and moldering Fritz in the doorway of the mausoleum, swaying, clutching at the stone. He always knows . . .

"Release him! I, a human, order it."

He is ashen and gasping, and the sunlight is doing awful things to him.

—The ancient circuits click and suddenly I am free.

"Yes, master," says the Over. "We did not know . . ."

"Seize that robot!"

He points a shaking, emaciated finger at him.

"He is the werebot," he gasps. "Destroy him! The one gathering flowers was obeying my orders. Leave him here with me."

He falls to his knees and the final darts of day pierce his flesh.

"And go! All the rest of you! Quickly! It is my order that no robot ever enter another graveyard again!"

He collapses within and I know that now there are only bone and bits of rotted shroud on the doorstep of our home.

Fritz has had his final joke—a human masquerade.

I take the roses to Kennington, as the silent 'bots file out through the gate forever, bearing the unprotesting Overbot with them. I place the roses at the foot of the monument—Kennington's and Fritz's—the monument of the last, strange, truly living ones.

Now only I remain unjunked.

In the final light of the sun I see them drive a stake through the Over's vite-box and bury him at the crossroads.

Then they hurry back toward their towers of steel, of plastic.

I gather up what remains of Fritz and carry him down to his box. The bones are brittle, and silent.

. . . It is a very proud and very lonely thing to be a stainless steel leech.

THE END

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(Continued from page 5)

Some years ago a man named Immanuel Velikovsky, a sort of unfrocked scientist, wrote a book called *Worlds in Collision*, which was a wild mish-mash of archeology, Biblical folklore, half-baked astronomy and astrology, and a few other things thrown in. His basic point was that much of Earth's geologic catastrophes—and thus its racial myths—had been caused by a planetary collision. Velikovsky was unanimously denounced, along with all his theories. However, it is interesting to note now that one of Velikovsky's predictions was that the temperature of Venus would be about 600 degrees Fahrenheit.

Velikovsky also predicted that the planet Jupiter was a source of radio waves. Pooh-pooh, all the astronomers pooh-poohed. Impossible! Yet, now that radio-astronomy has come into its own with increasingly sensitive instrumentation, it has been discovered, oddly enough, that Jupiter is a main source of radio signals. As W. S. Gilbert pointed out long ago in one of his patter songs, "Winnow, winnow, winnow all my folly and you'll find a

grain or two of truth among the chaff."

One other fascinating find accomplished by Mariner was its measurements of the solar wind—the streams of hot ionized gas blown outward from the Sun's inner corona. This gas appears to be the dominant feature of interplanetary space in our region of the Solar System. The solar wind, or plasma, although of low energy content, is so dense—about a billion times more solar-wind particles exist than do cosmic rays—that its effects are quite noticeable on earth in terms of magnetic storms.

When the sun's surface is relatively quiet, the solar wind moves at less than 250 miles a second. But when solar flares eject clouds of plasma, the speed intensifies. The solar wind, scientists think, is more like a blast from a rocket nozzle than anything else. And just as a supersonic jet pushed a shockwave of sound ahead of its nose to cause a supersonic boom, so the solar wind pushes a plasma shockwave ahead of itself, striking earth's magnetic field with what we might term a supermagnetic boom that distorts the boundaries of that field.

Question: How can you be sure not to miss any of the great future issues including a new Sharkey novel?

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THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

The Night Shapes. By James Blish. 125 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 50¢.

If television had a panel show called "Who's the Author?" to stand alongside that old reliable, "What's My Line?", James Blish's latest book, *The Night Shapes*, would certainly stump the experts and win the jackpot. As far as establishing authorship, this is undoubtedly the mystery book of the year. It contains absolutely everything but science fiction, and the fantasy in it (excluding magic) could fit comfortably on the head of a pin.

Blish refers to this latest work as an historical novel. To a certain extent this is true, as he does give us an historical framework for the story; but usually one thinks of an historical novel in terms of a fictional re-creation of a certain historical event or period, something considerably broader than Mr. Blish has conceived here.

The scene is the Belgian Congo, but not the Congo of Lumumba and Tshombe with which we have become familiar today. This is the Congo of the early 1900's. We see it and travel in it through the eyes of Kit Kennedy, late of the U.S. but now stateless, without a passport. He had been run out of his native Kansas, where he had been a schoolmaster, because he had made one of his students pregnant. In Africa, already he has become a legend. Known to the natives as Ktendi, he is a King of the Wasabi and holds many other titles as well. He is held in fear and esteem by many tribes, versed in magic and drum talk, and at home in the varied and complex lore of the natives.

Kennedy agrees to lead a strangely assorted expedition to the interior—a group of marines, a man named Stahl, and a Dr. Lee and his beautiful wife, Paula, a pathologist. From the

moment the expedition starts, the action of the story never lets down. Kennedy is adopted by a python, Manalendi (which only increases his reputation among the natives); the expedition is ambushed; Kennedy and his man, Tombu (naturally he has a man), stumble onto a mammoth illegal mining operation for radium ore which is carried out by diseased slaves under the leadership of an Arab lady of ill repute; and Kennedy finds that the rest of the expedition are prisoners there at the very place that they were to investigate, etc. Dominating the action is Kennedy, who is more like Tarzan than Tarzan himself, even to swinging through the trees.

I only hope that Mr. Blish wrote this book for entertainment—his own, I mean—and that after relaxing with it he will settle down to something more meaty. It is very difficult to read this work even as a straight adventure story, because in it, the words turn unbidden into movie blurbs amid technicolor hoopla—"See the drum duel—Listen to the pulsating jungle rhythms—See beautiful Paula and Kit in their tree bed—See the dinosaurs—the jungle fire—the stampede of the animals!"

There is a small inducement for those who hunger for something more substantial than mere entertainment. Mr. Blish has

thoughtfully appended a short glossary of Swahili, and the studious reader will soon learn handy and utilitarian phrases like "If you help somebody during the dry season, he may help you during the rainy season."

Podkayne of Mars. By Robert Heinlein. 191 pp. G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$3.50.

The indefatigable Robert Heinlein has written still another book. This one, his twenty-ninth, attempts less than some of his recent opuses, and succeeds very nicely. It has few pretensions, little philosophy, and quite a lot of humor and charm, which latter qualities I, for one, have seldom associated with Mr. Heinlein. If this denotes a change of focus it will be highly welcome; if it's just a one-time experiment, it is still an enjoyable one.

Meet Podkayne of Mars—not a horny, three-eyed alien or a trance-like ascetic or any other character of exotic nature, but a sassy, blonde sixteen-year-old Martian girl whose diary forms Heinlein's novel. To the unskilled writer, a diary may seem a simple way to write a book, but in reality it can be a dangerous one. Heinlein comes through this test skillfully. He seems to have found just the correct sixteen-year-old tone to use, whereas most adults writing through the

mouths of children end up making them sound either like adults, or just too coy and precious for words.

Between Podkayne's humorous adventures and teen-age soul-searchings, the reader is exposed to a substantial amount of painlessly injected information about Martian and Venusian life, history, mores, culture, etc. This represents, to my mind at least, a great improvement over Heinlein's more frequent method of giving essential background in a chunky mass.

Podkayne Fries, more familiarly known as "Poddy," is bright and inventive, but the bane of her existence is her younger brother Clark, who, in addition to being the nuisance that eleven-year-old brothers can be to a young lady, is, unfortunately for Poddy, brighter and even more inventive. His various mischievous acts are marvels of mechanical and chemical know-how. Outwit him she cannot; try again and again she feels she must. We meet Clark not only through Poddy's description, but also head-on as he finds the diary and puts in his two cents' worth in the fashion of all snoops.

Poddy, Clark and all the other inhabitants of Mars are not native to the planet, but are descendants of Earthmen. These Marsmen, as they are called, have displaced the original in-

habitants, called Martians, now extinct but who once had a higher civilization than the Earthmen.

The Fries family is going to take a trip to Earth. Poddy is excited to think of seeing this primitive planet, though she refuses to believe that her ancestors came from there. The family is together very little because Poddy's parents are always busy. Poddy's mother is a Master Engineer who delights in ripping up things of the past and replacing them with the finest and latest technological developments. But alas! Poddy's father is a History professor with an iron-clad reverence for anything old. Because of their high intelligence and great achievements, the Fries family was permitted to have five children. Mrs. Fries has given birth to all five, but only Poddy and Clark have been "unbottled" up to now. The accidental unbottling of the other three throws a crimp into the trip, and the Fries family finds itself with triplets. Broken-hearted, Poddy and Clark persuade their Uncle Tom, a Senator-at-Large of the Republic, to take them instead, and prevail upon the embarrassed Nursery (it is called a Crèche on Mars) to rectify their horrendous error by furnishing deluxe spaceship tickets. These tickets are for Earth, but with a stop first at Venus.

This latter fact leads me to my only real objection about the novel. Heinlein embroils his characters in a political intrigue on the Ship and on Venus and never gets us to Earth at all. What occurs is exciting, but after hearing Podkayne's pungent remarks about Earthmen and Earth culture, it is a shame we couldn't get to see the explosive reactions of Poddy to Earthers and of Earthers to Poddy (to say nothing of Clark)! A minor objection, but I mention it here so that perhaps Mr. Heinlein may be prodded into a sequel—something I rarely advocate.

First Through Time. By Rex Gordon. 160 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 40¢.

After quite a long wait, Rex Gordon has brought out another of his "First" books. (Remember *First on Mars* and *First to the Stars*?) This one, *First Through Time*, takes a chew at one of science fiction's favorite cuds, time travel, and all the apparent paradoxes it involves.

In a quiet university in Tennessee, a scientist named Galbraith and his two assistants are engaged in experiments using the enormously expensive research tool, the proton-synchrotron. Though financed with federal funds, the government seems far more interested in other things, such as the results of

bomb tests, for one, than in what is going on with this linear accelerator. Then the machine stops working, or appears to do so. Galbraith, the chief, refuses to be alarmed at this temperamental behavior in his "baby" and attributes the change to some new principle they do not understand.

And so it turns out. The speed of these protons—nearly the speed of light—breaks down the time insulation. In an effort to record the passage of the protons, a camera is introduced into the experiments. The pictures that result show the passage of time and also what seems to be the end of the world. But is this really the future which is exposed on the film? And if it is the future, is it already changed by the fact that it is known, or is it so pre-determined that even knowledge of what is ahead is not enough to make possible any change?

Now the government and the armed forces become very concerned with Professor Galbraith and his machine. A human volunteer must be found to go in place of the camera and try to determine the cause of this apparent catastrophe in the future. Was there a natural disaster? An atomic war?

Major Judgen, in training for the space program, is trans-

(Continued on page 128)

... OR SO YOU SAY

(continued from page 4)

John Carter? Of course not! Yet, both these stories had exciting, fast paced plots.

By the way, the first issue of the fanzine, *Cursed* is available from me for a dime. Among other things, it contains an article about AMAZING.

Arnold Katz
98 Patton Blvd.
New Hyde Park
New York

● *You mean to say AMAZING is Cursed already? In that case we prefer to identify with John Carter, who could hold his own against a curse.*

Dear Editor:

Is Laurence Janifer perhaps a pseudonym for Larry M. Harris? If not, I would like to know where S. E. Cotts got the information for his statement on page 123 of your January ish that Mark Phillips is a pseudonym for the team of Garret and Janifer. I have the original ms. of the story reviewed and can say, with certainty, that *Brain Twister* (*That Sweet Little Old Lady*) was written by Messrs. Garret and Harris.

Richard Plzak
248 N. Linden Ave.
Palatine, Ill.

● *Janifer and Harris are one and the same.*

... OR SO YOU SAY

Dear Editor:

In regard to your February issue, I think it was one of the best issues you've gotten together in recent months. ALL the stories were good, and the author profile of Arthur C. Clarke was very interesting.

To return to the stories, Bradley and Sharkey are always good, and I see that Ed Hamilton is returning next month. THAT is always good news. Let's have more stories by them.

Are we going to see Robert Adragna's art work in AMAZING? I liked the work he did in the December FANTASTIC. Please keep Coye out of AMAZING, his work is not very good in my opinion.

Since everyone seems to be fighting over the various merits of Burroughs as opposed to Kline, I'll say that I definitely favor Burroughs. His style is much smoother, and I feel his stories have a more developed plot. Kline is good, but he's not in a class with E.R.B.

It surprised me to see what S. E. Cotts had written in defense of himself, but I agreed 100% and was glad to see him take a stand.

Any hope of return to the 146 page AMAZING?

Paul Brague
Box 12
Eldred, N.Y.

● *There's always hope.*

Dear Editor:

I was extremely interested in Mr. Mesnard's comments, in the January issue, on the use of Venerian inhabitant names, particularly in the reported adoption of "Cytherean" to pertain to Venus and its physical conditions. Venus, as I pointed out some years ago in a couple of articles in *The Talisman*, has more possible words attached to it and its inhabitants than any other planet in the system. I did not anticipate Cytherean, however. It seems to me it would suffer even more than Venerian from the complaint that people would not know what it means.

First, it should be pointed out that both Aphrodite and Cytherea were abstract terms pertaining to the goddess, not the planet. Venus was used for both. Other terms applied to the planet itself were Phosphorus or Lucifer, the morning star, and Hesperus or Venus, the evening star. From these we could have Luciferian or Hesperian! The latter *has* been used, and is better than Cytherean, which was never (until now!) applied to the planet. Willy Ley pointed out to me that useful terms can be derived from Hesperus for the near and far points, and for topography—perihesperion, aphesperion, hesperiography. I would add hesperiology—the study of the physical conditions of Venus.

The Greek names of the planets are very useful for formation of similar terms. I am again indebted to Mr. Ley for Hermes, Hermeian, perihhermeion and aphermeion, to refer to Mercury. R. S. Richardson called attention to Percival Lowell's use of Ares, Arean, areography for Mars. The dictionary adds areology. A similar construction for the Earth has been used—Ge or Gaea, Gaeian (pronounced jee-a, jee-an). The English words geography, geology, perigee, apogee come from this source.

This tendency in English to use the Greek root is well exemplified, as Mr. Mesnard points out, for the Moon. Selenic and selenography from Selene, the Greek goddess, are well established. Selenite was H. G. Wells' inhabitant name. Selenian fits the general modern scheme. These words have priority in literature and science over the johnny-come-lately Luna, Lunar, derived from Latin, and there is no reason at all why they shouldn't be used. I see no reason, also, why periselene and aposelene shouldn't be used for the near and far points. I am not quite sure of the exact form of the ending, but these forms are less clumsy than any other ending might make them, and they parallel perigee and apogee. Incidentally, there are three syllables in Selene (See-lee-nee), and

presumably the final "e" of periselene and aposelene would also be sounded. Note that the "o" of the prefix apo- is dropped before an aspirate or vowel, as in ap hesperion or aphelion, but not before a consonant, as in apogee or aposelene. For Mars the forms would be periareon and apareon.

Philip N. Bridges
5100 Randolph Rd.
Rockville, Md.

● *With which communicate we bring to a close, for the time being, our researches into planetary nomenclature. (Have you heard about the two enemies on Uranus? "Ur anian," said one. "Ur another," said the other.)*

Miss Goldsmith:

Until 1955 I was an avid science fiction fan, but then the similarity of plots, characters, locales ad nauseum, left no real reason for reading sf. Today, for the first time in years, I picked up January AMAZING STORIES.

The one bit of intelligence in the whole magazine appeared on pages 126 and 127 (Mr. Lorne Yacuk's letter). Mr. Yacuk's letter noted the general lackadaisical attitude on the part of the reader.

Mr. Yacuk: What can you expect from readers that would buy rubbish, such as that generally going under the name of science fiction? A great number

of readers were (and I suppose still are) attracted to science fiction because of the novelty of genuine imagination inherent in this type of writing. However, somewhere along the line, someone substituted quantity for quality. The average "sf fan" not being aware of quality, accepted this substitution with great glee as a sign of "acceptance," among authors and others, of the legitimacy of science fiction as a separate field of endeavor.

Hogwash: many authors discovered that by changing a few dates, mis-spelling a name here and there, and utilizing an item described in the latest issue of "Popular Household Physics for the Weak-Minded and Aspiring Author", they could produce quite acceptable science fiction—acceptable, that is, to the indiscriminating publisher, editor and reader. Because the reader lacks discrimination, because the stories lack distinction, no true controversy is possible.

Because no controversy is possible, except for the piddling "the covers are good but there's been an overstock of stereotyped spacesuits on them", (Byron Rogers letter—page 124) one could hardly expect a brilliant criticism or an equally brilliant defending letter. Mr. Yacuk is perfectly correct in his observations concerning sf story's heroes,

especially where he states that science fiction readers identify with bums, drunks, thieves, etc.

Harailt A. MacDomhnull
425 "D" St., Apt. "C"

Chula Vista, California

● *What's all this about no controversy? You seem to be doing all right.*

Dear Editor:

I'd like to pass on a word of praise for Sam Moskowitz' SF Profiles.

I used to think SaM unbearably arch and prepossessing in his previous appearances in SAT-ELLITE, FANTASTIC UNIVERSE and various fanzines. But now he seems less patronizing (to the reader) and more easyspoken and out-going.

The one thing that bothers me about the profiles is the manner in which they progress in pertinent detail up to about the mid and late 'forties and then hastily

run a bee-line to the nearby closing sentences. There is hardly any mention of the author's latter-day accomplishments. I can only surmise that SaM, like Marcel Proust, retired early from life to devote himself to his reminiscences which extend no further than this period.

But, of course, that can't really be so. The only answer to these lop-sided biographies is that we must have another go-around to the authors already bioged, this time bringing them up to date. Besides, we're about out of first rate authors anyway.

There is also a very important group of sf personalities as yet untouched. That hybrid animal, the author/editor. E. g., Boucher, Campbell, Merril, Pohl.

Bob Williams

3738 Olive

St. Louis 8, Mo.

● *Oh, no! Lots of first-rate authors left. As for editors, see profile in August issue.*

THE SPECTROSCOPE

(continued from page 124)

ferred to the synchrotron project. At first, he is frustrated at this sudden change in his fortunes. Then he becomes involved and eager to try.

Though Mr. Gordon's picture of the future seems compounded of bits and pieces freely borrowed from all other authors

who ever wrote about the future (we have Mutants, the Communal Mind, the Survivors, etc.), he can instill even familiar elements with adventure. The technical details will please the gimmick-minded readers, and his attempted proofs of the nature of time and the future will give the logicians among us something on which to try their muscles.



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